

英雄譚

キャバルリイ

8

海空りく

RIKU MISORA

Illust をん

威牙騎士の





落第騎士の
英雄譚 キヤバルリイ 8



「明日はアタシの試合が先。
一足早く決勝で待ってるわよ」

闘志に燃えたぎる真紅の瞳で一瞥してから、
ステラは公園を後にした。



「此処で終わりだ」

ぐれん こうじょ
《紅蓮の皇女》ステラ・ヴァーミリオン
の七星剣武祭は、
しちせいけんぶさい



僕、——この試合を
棄権きけんしようと思うんです

あまりに唐突で、予想だにしない天音の
宣言に会場中がどよめいた。

Intermission - In Order Not To Regret For A Second Time

If she closed her eyes, she could still remember it clearly.

In her childhood. The memory of the days she spent with her most beloved older brother.

She was always following around behind him.

She wasn't good at getting spoiled, just following behind him, unable to call out to him, but.....every time her older brother saw her figure, he would smile at her, call her name, and wave at her.

She was happy about that.

And when she came closer in response to his wave, he would gently stroke her hair.

That sensation was a bliss.

Her uneventful every day was truly filled with happiness.

—Truly.....how foolish she was.

That's right, to her past self, Shizuku Kurogane.....cursed the her that innocently took her older brother's love for granted.

If she recalled back in her current self, 「shadow」 existed in every corner of their daily lives.

Amongst the gatherings of many relatives.

Within the pupils that were looking from afar at the sword and magic training they were receiving as if it was natural.

Or the side face of her older brother that she finally found in a wide room—

Whenever her older brother noticed her gaze, he would immediately hide it in his smile.....getting spoiled by that smile, she didn't think deeply about it.....certainly, 「shadow」 existed.

Her older probably had probably been fighting it by himself since that time.

Against all the unreasonabilities surrounding him.

She couldn't notice it at all at that time.

Just getting spoiled by her beloved older brother, she couldn't become his strength.

However.....it would be different for the current her.

What was important to him? What was he hoping for?

The current her knew it clearly.

And then.....what was it that she should do, as well.

(For that sake, I —— am fine with losing everything.)

Chapter 11 - Bloody Truth

Part 1

“Right before today’s match begins, I will assault Amane Shinomiya in the waiting room.”

“Eh.....”

It was after they went to the department stores with the usual members in addition to Sara Bloodlily.

Taking their leave first, on the way back to the venue.....Shizuku Kurogane declared that to Nagi Arisuin who was walking next to her.

“What...are you saying, Shizuku.....”

The declaration was so shocking that Arisuin had stopped in his tracks and asked back.

In response to that, Shizuku answered with a determined expression.

“Just like I said, Alice. This is based on my deductions about Bad Luck, Amane Shinomiya’s ability.....Nameless Glory’s

countermeasure.

Nameless Glory is a causality interference ability that has a strong enforcement as can be seen.

In the case when that ability holder wishes for my defeat, or his victory.....it will be difficult for me, who only possesses nature interference ability, to overcome.

First, without a doubt, the causality will revolve around his wish.

Like the time with the White-Robed Knight, and the second round today, some sort of coincidence will definitely happen, leading to my defeat.

It can be considered as inevitable. At this rate, I won't even be able to stand on the ring in the third round.

My blade...will not reach him.

In that case.....I will purposely make use of that inevitability."

"Make use?"

"That's right. My defeat.....with the pretext of violation of rules, I will defeat that guy. With me taking action that may violate the rules myself, it will not trigger the causal interference ability, allowing me to close in on Amare. If it's

this method, I can bypass Nameless Glory. My blade can reach that guy.”

That answer was guided by Shizuku’s deductions.

Hearing that, Arisuin was also convinced.

Indeed, using that method, it could probably aim at the loophole in Amane’s extraordinary ability.

It would be possible to create a surprise attack using Amane’s weakness, who held absolute confidence in his ability.

It was an excellent move from both the offensive and defensive perspectives.

However—

“But in that case, Shizuku will lose due to violation of rules in the end, right!?”

Right, that was the issue.

That countermeasure could only work if she gave up her victory of the match.

If not, it would not work.

Then it would be meaningless.

However, in regards to that, Shizuku's words—

“It doesn't matter.”

Like that, she spoke resolutely.

“What did you say.....!”

“A nature interference type Blazer like me cannot do anything about causality interference. If it were to happen during the match, then it's one thing, but I don't stand a chance if the causality has already been involved even before the match.....However, giving up because it can't be helped, I don't intend to behave in such a mature manner. At this rate, if I have to forfeit without doing anything, I want to drag him down with me as well. Alice has also heard it, right? What that guy had said to Onii-sama after Stella-san's match.”

“.....Yeah.”

「And so...that's why? Get hurt more. Bleed more. Wear out more. I will cheer for that Ikki-kun until my voice grow hoarse. Because I want to see Ikki-kun keep, keep, keeeep on defying fate and break down from now on!」

Those words, along with that warped scary smile, had been

burned into her memory.

“I cannot let such a dangerous guy get any closer to Onii-sama.....It’s fine if I lose. However, in exchange, I won’t let that guy go to the semi-finals. With this surprise attack, I will deal enough damage that it cannot be recovered in a day, knocking him out of the event.”

That was the level of determination of Shizuku, who loved her brother more than anyone else.

However — It was not something that Arisuin could agree with.

“Shizuku.....certainly, I also think that he is a dangerous guy. I can also understand Shizuku’s concern. However, you see. What you are about to do is a really malignant violation of rules.”

“The same could be said about the other party. In the first place, if he didn’t do such a rule-breaking thing like eliminating his opponent before the match, I would not have chosen such a method.”

“Yeah. I agree with that. However.....it’s frustrating, but we don’t have any evidence of Amane breaking the rules. The result of coincidence piling upon coincidence.....he can make such an excuse. But Shizuku, you can’t do that. Even if you

handled it well, there will definitely be a severe punishment. Getting disqualified would still be fine.....but expulsion is also quite possible.”

That’s right. The method Shizuku suggested could certainly avoid Nameless Glory, and possibly pierce Amane with her blade.

However, that was greatly different from an assassination.

Shizuku would not come out unscathed.

The risk she carried was too great.

“Even if you cleared the obstacle after carrying such a big risk by yourself, Ikki would not be happy. No. It’s not just Ikki. Stella-chan as well. Both of them will definitely grieve over it.”

Of course, himself included.

It was not something tolerable.

However, Shizuku, towards Arisuin’s words.....showed a vague smile...

“.....I know that. I know that very well. Onii-sama, and Stella-san.....are kind.

That's why, Alice. I had fun today. My beloved Onii-sama was there, and Stella-san, who loves my Onii-sama, was there, Alice was there, some extra person was there, but I really had fun. No. It was not just today. It has been like that ever since I enrolled into this school. This is.....different from the past. Different from the time at that house, without a doubt, I really think that everyday is wonderful. That's why I can say this.....I'm really glad to have come to Hagun Academy."

She murmured so as if reminiscing.

"Shizuku.....you....."

".....Sorry, Alice. I can't just accept my defeat without doing anything, despite knowing that calamity is about to befall onto Onii-sama."

Even if she were to be expelled.

Even if she could not spend the days like they did currently ever again—

"This time, I will protect Onii-sama."

She had vowed as such ever since the day her brother was gone.

Shizuku's expression after concluding her speech no longer showed that vague smile.

What replaced it was a strong will like steel.

What supported her great love for her brother that could not fit in her little body was that unshakable determination.

Then, Shizuku looked up at Arisuin with those pupils filled with that determination...

"But.....to make this surprise attack a complete success, my power alone is not enough."

She appealed to him.

"Alice.....Can you lend me your power?"

She hoped that he would lend her his power after knowing the risk involved with the violation of the rules.

She hoped that he would accompany her on her path.

—It was not something that could be said without complete trust.

In response to that trust...

".....I understand. I will lend you a hand."

Arisuin was not a person that would refuse it.

(Sorry, Ikki. It seems that I'm not such a good friend.)

As he listened to Shizuku's "Thank you", Arisuin smiled bitterly.

If he had been a good friend, he would have probably stop her at all cost.

That surprise attack would make Shizuku suffer a huge penalty, whether it succeeded or not.

For example, it if was Stella.....she probably would not forgive such an act.

However.....Arisuin understood her well.

Just how deeply and strongly that girl loved her brother.

It was already to the extent that even his words would not stop her.

No, it was not just his. Most probably, even Ikki himself could not stop her.

It was obvious.

There was an existence closing in on the person she loved, intending to harm him.

She could not pretend not to have seen it. She could also not just let it pass.

If he refused there, Shizuku would probably carry out the surprise attack by herself.

He painfully understood that feeling.

In that case.....

(—I won't let her be alone.)



If he couldn't dissuade her or stop her, then he would at least stay next to her.

It was on the day he separated from the Rebellion.

He had decided to continue staying next to her as long as she wished for it.....!

—And with that, the two of them moved to carry out their surprise attack.

Time returned to the moment before the start of the third match in the third round.

The method was simple. They would use Arisuin's Noble Art, Shadow Walk, to bypass the security network by walking through the shadow, reaching the waiting room Amane was at from an alternate space. As soon as she flew out, she would shoot countless ice spears — and pierce through the defenseless Amane who believed that he would win without doing anything.

She carried the plan out perfectly, swiftly, and without any obstacle.

“_____”

With a heavy **boom** sound, countless ice spears pierced into Amane's body, their intensity knocked his body onto the wall, then his body collapsed soundlessly onto the floor.

At the same time, a pool of blood spread out on the cold floor. It was spilled out from his penetrated four limbs and his skull.

"I won't apologize."

Shizuku threw those words at Amane, who was like a ragged cloth with his head lowered.

In the first place, Shizuku was reluctant to do something of such an extent towards a defenseless person.

Regardless of who her opponent was, if they faced off on the battlefield, she would choose to defeat her opponent in a contest of actual strength.

However, it was none other than Amane himself who rejected that, and considering that he used despicable means to shift the location of the ring that was supposed to determine the victor, there was no reason for her to show any mercy anymore.

"Curse your own foolishness for playing a prank on the wrong opponent."

It was not life-threatening, but Amane suffered a serious injury no matter how one looked at it.

Especially the damage to the brain, it would take time to recover even with the help of a capsule.

Even though he won without fighting just as he wished, the recovery would not make it in time for the semi-final.

“With this.....”

It's finished. —It was supposed to be.

Shizuku had removed the calamity approaching her most beloved person, or so it should have been.

—If her enemy did not possess the Bad Luck that could move the stars.

“A-hahaha.....Ahahaha! I see, you did it this way!”

““—!?””

Amane lifted up his body from the pool of blood.

Despite his four limbs, or rather, his skull being pierced by ice spears, his mouth showed a smile.

It was the same one he showed when meeting Ikki, a distorted smile that could only be described as a murderous smile.

“What a surprise! Oh wow, I’m really surprised! If you take action and break the rules yourself, it’s true that my Nameless Glory will not activate. You will be able to approach me. That said.....as expected, I didn’t think that you will take such extreme action without any hesitation! What an incredible determination! I can’t believe that you are Ikki-kun’s blood-related sister from taking such measures!”

“No way.....”

“Why are you able to stand up with such wounds as if nothing happened.....”

As expected, Shizuku and Arisuin could not hide their shock.

In response, Amane pulled out the ice spear that pierced through his brain unhesitantly with his hand...

“Who knows? I wonder why. I also don’t know why myself. Well, there are people in the world that can drive a car by themselves to the hospital with a knife stabbed into their head; there are also stories of people surviving with a bullet in their brain. Then isn’t this something that is not

impossible? See — I have much better luck than normal people.”

“.....!”

In that instant, Arisuin moved.

He activated his Noble Art, Shadow Bind, which sealed his opponent’s movement by nailing his shadow.

Sealing Amane’s movement...

“Shizuku!”

—Grasped the hand of Shizuku, who was astonished by the reality before her eyes, and escaped.

As a former assassin, having gone through many practical scenes, he was able to understand.

The surprise attack just then was perfect.

They had definitely broke through Amane’s weakness, and dealt enough damage to cause a person to lose consciousness.

Despite so, the 「result」 betrayed the 「process」.

In that case, they had no other means.

If such a perfect surprise attack could not twist it, then there was nothing they could do from then on.

Arisuin understood that.

The conjecture of Arisuin the assassin was correct.

What he was wrong in was—

They already lost the option of escaping.

“——!”

It happened in a fraction of an instant.

In an instant, the lighting in the waiting room flickered while making a noise.

It might have been the aging of the light bulb, or a delay in the wiring, or some interference of power that made the coincidence inevitable.

For just an instance, the room lost all light, darkness covered everything.

At the same time the shadow disappeared, it also meant that the effect of Shadow Bind that bound the shadow was lost...

(Not good!)

It was already too late by the time he felt the danger.

“Gu...ah.....!”

Countless thin swords like crosses flew out from the lightless darkness and accurately pierced Arisuin’s entire body.

That damage knocked out his consciousness and his body sank into the pool of blood formed by his own blood.

“Alice!”

“Don’t return in such a hurry now. You took the trouble of coming here after all.”

After Amane took out Arisuin, once again he manifested countless swords in between his fingers — his Device, *Azure*, and spoke to the remaining Shizuku.

“I don’t really have any intention of blaming you guys for what you have done. No. Rather, I’m shivering from how moved I am right now. From Shizuku-chan’s intense love towards Ikki-kun. Incredible. A person can be loved to such an extent. I also love Ikki-kun a lot, but I feel like I lost.....That’s why, I will give such a Shizuku-chan a special chance.”

“Chance?”

“For one minute from now, I will 「wish for this disturbance not to be noticed by anyone」. —Can you understand? If you can finish me off in one minute, your wish will be granted!”

“Don’t be...so arrogant.....!”

Since she had already started it, she did not intend to run away.

Without the need of a bait to be dangled before her, Shizuku attacked Amane again.

Currently, she used Scarlet Water Blade — wrapping her Device, *Yoishigure*, with a blade made of pressurized water, she chose close combat.

With close combat, she intended to use her own hands to sever Amane’s consciousness for sure.

However — the instant she raised her heel for that intention, it happened.

“Eh!?”

Her vision suddenly shook.

The reason was underneath Shizuku’s feet. Stepping onto

Arisuin's blood, she slipped.

"Kuh!"

However, Shizuku quickly pushed her hand on the floor to reject falling down.

Regaining her posture, with the murderous blade in her hand, she rushed at Amane again.

—No, she wanted to.

"Aww!"

However, her right toe tip kicked onto her left calf, causing her to fall forward.

(This is.....don't tell me.....!)

"Fufufu, ahahaha. Tripping over your own foot at this kind of timing, you sure are unlucky. No, perhaps.....it's me who's lucky?"

While mocking her, Amane got closer slowly as if teasing her.

Shizuku immediately jumped back up, and back stepped to take distance as she gave up getting closer.

And then—

“Water Prison Orb!”

She denied the worst possibility showing up in her mind, and used magic attack from long distance.

The magic that was released was Shizuku’s signature move.

Once it hit, Water Prison Orb would block the opponent’s windpipe until the opponent suffocated .

She shot three rounds at the opponent she wanted to defeat.

However, the three shots of Water Prison Orb, without exception, slipped past the slowly closing in and defenseless Amane, then crashed onto the wall and splattered.

“~~~~~!”

“To miss at this distance, it’s a rare mistake for a knight at Shizuku-chan’s level!”

Amane laughed at her with muddy and creepy pupils.

—With that, it was three times. No, it would be four times including the surprise attack which could not deal a fatal injury.

Shizuku could already confirm it without a doubt.

“Nameless Glory can even induce us to make an error huh.”

“.....Who knows? But since I only wished 「Win this game」, I don't really understand it. However.....there is such a saying - people make mistakes. As long as you are a human, any action definitely contains the possibility of failure. Taking one step with your feet. Even though it's such a simple action, there are people who twist their ankles, or get tripped by a small stone, resulting in failure. Let alone magic, which requires complicated configuration operation and trajectory calculation.....it can't be helped if you failed, right?”

“.....”

The more she understood it, the more she felt that it was a balance-breaking ability.

If it could induce an error, Blue Reincarnation would be too dangerous to use.

(What can I do—)

“An opening!”

“!? Ah, guh.....!”

In the instant that Shizuku was trapped in the fear of going against Amane's ability, Amane had closed in and swung his

Azure.

Shizuku was late to respond and could not prevent it, receiving a deep cut on her forehead.

A curtain of blood dyed her eyesight.

With such an eyesight, she could not properly defend against the pursuing attacks.

Shizuku judged that it was bad and immediately took some distance.

However, her back slammed onto something right behind.

It was a concrete wall.

She was cornered.

That fact made the alarm in her heart go off uncontrollably.

Anxiety and pain caused sweat to ooze out from her entire body.

How should she fight, she could not see a glimpse of hint.

She had no idea.

That anxiety, despair, helplessness had weighed on Shizuku's

heart.

Even so—

“——!”

That's right, that 'even so' supported Shizuku's heart that succumbed to despair, and she glared at Amane.

It's true that she did not know how she should fight.

However, she knew that she had to do something.

—Amane Shinomiya.

(This bastard's eyes.....)

Those pupils were tainted by all kinds of negative emotions.

They were unmistakably directed at her most beloved one.

She could not let this guy get any closer to her brother.

Also—

Shizuku did not have the passion that her brother or Stella had towards the battles between knights, but even so, in the past few months, she had desperately fought to reach where she was.

And she saw the passion of those people who reached the Festival during the process.

The action of Amane openly breaking rules and kicking away his opponent was sacrilege against them.

It was unforgivable.

Hence, Shizuku opened her eyes while ignoring the pain from her blood soaking her pupils and — shouted.

“You don’t have the right to be in the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival!

This is the dream stage for the knights that are proud of their knighthood!

You, who do not have any pride or dreams, are not qualified to advance any further.....!

I will definitely subdue you right here.....!!”

Even if she were to be penalized, she must make him pay for the sacrilege against that dream stage.

Right behind her, at the wall at Shizuku’s back, countless waves spread out.

They increased in an instant, making a big splash...

“Calamity Rain of Bloody Storm!!!!”

Like the curse of Lorelei, foam sprayed around.

The foam blown out from the back of Shizuku was like the turbulent lake surface on a stormy day, turned into highly pressurized bullets and flew towards Amane — no, towards the whole space before Shizuku, shot out altogether like a gatling gun.

If she would make an error with aiming, she just had to stop aiming.

She would crush him with a suppressive fire that did not need to be aimed.

The water pressure bullets that were released with such intensity shook the whole room like a waterfall.

Mist condensed like steam.

The room was filled with dense mist that one could not even see past one meter around.

—Right after that.

“How unfortunate. Time’s up.”

“——Ah.”

Silver flash pierced through the dense mist and flew before her eyes.

Azure was thrown.

They accurately pierced through Shizuku’s limbs in that dense mist, with force that was enough to lift her light body, sewing her onto the wall behind.

“Ka...ah.....!?”

The discomfort and pressure from the pain in her entire body and her throat pierced by a blade caused Shizuku to moan in pain.

However, that pain was blown out of her consciousness when she saw the scene in the room after the mist cleared up.

“No.....way.....”

Even though she just executed a suppressing fire that could bury everything in sight, Amare did not have a single injury.

Despite the entire wall turning into a beehive, only the

portion of the wall behind Amane was unscathed.

That's right. In Shizuku's omnidirectional suppressing fire, only the water bullets that came into contact with Amane lost their hardness due to the magic control error made by Shizuku herself, becoming just harmless water foam.

"I see. If aiming will fail, then just don't aim in the first place, huh. You have thought of various things. Does everyone think of all those things when fighting? Incredible. My uniform is soaked thanks to that. But well, it feels nice to be a little cooling, so I guess I'm lucky.....Fufu. Ahaha. AHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

Amane mockingly laughed in a nightmare-like scene.

Shizuku feared that kind of guy from the bottom of her heart.

(He can even make it possible to such an extent.....)

No matter how well-practised the move she used was, as long as there existed a trace of possibility for failure — her speculation was that it would 100% fail.

The world was twisted, the causality was bent.

And everything was concluded in a direction advantageous to Amane.

It was exactly.....an unfairness that could only be said as overly dotting.

At that moment, Shizuku's rationale finally caught up to Arisuin, who tried to escape immediately after the surprise attack failed.

So that was why. It was only obvious to do that.

(Against such a power, the chance of winning is.....zero.....)

And then, despair finally captured Shizuku's heart, devouring her.

At the same time—

「Contender Shinomiya! Contender Shizuku! What exactly are you two doing!?!」

From the speaker, the announcer's voice that was close to a scream, shrieked.

The disturbance had finally been noticed by the outside.

And Amane responded to the voice that asked for an explanation of the situation.

While he was standing by in the waiting room, Shizuku suddenly assaulted him.

He had only fought back in self-defense at most.

The truth could probably be proven from the surveillance camera.

(I'm so.....miserable.)

In her flickering consciousness from blood loss and lack of oxygen, Shizuku regretted as she heard Amane's voice from afar.

In the end, she had only shamed herself without being able to do anything.

—However...

“Ah, come to think of it, I believe that Ikki-kun is also listening to this broadcast. It may be strange coming from a victim such as myself, but I hope that you will not reprimand Shizuku-chan! Since Shizuku-chan has violated the rules for Ikki-kun's sake!”

“——!?!?”

Things like regret were blown away by Amane's words.

Shizuku wanted to raise a voice of protest about what exactly was he saying.

However, her damaged throat could not generate any voice, only able to make whimpers like a mosquito buzz.

And in the meantime, Amane selfishly conveyed Shizuku's feelings.

"I, who had fought with her, have understood. Ikki-kun. Shizuku-chan has been in love with you. Of course it's not familial love. She loves you as a member of the opposite sex. That's why when Ikki-kun and Stella-chan became a couple, I believe that she had always been having a hard time. I think that she had always, during all that time, wanted Ikki-kun to look at her, to care for her, to continue thinking about her."

"Sto.....p....."

Shizuku squealed with an inaudible voice.

To stop him from saying unnecessary things.

To not selfishly announce her own feelings.

".....And she took the wrong path while holding such feelings.....To eliminate an enemy that may become an obstacle to your dream, with becoming the Seven Stars

Sword King as a goal; To contribute to your dream, and be loved by you in return. She held such a twisted desire.”

“.....S.....to.....p.....”

However, Shizuku’s squeal could not be heard, and Amane continued to talk about his own interpretation to Ikki.

That was an unbearable pain to Shizuku.

—Because she wanted him to look back at her. Because she wanted to be loved.

She didn’t fight for those. Even so, even so.....

“It’s true that what Shizuku-chan did was wrong, but I think that wanting to be loved back by the person she loves is only natural. That’s why I hope that you will somehow consider her feelings. And then, how about it? If Ikki-kun can accept her feelings, and love Shizuku-chan as a woman—”

She was already at her limit.

“Uue.....egu.....” (TL note: This is the sound of her crying, not broken words.)

It was the most important feeling in her heart.

As a sibling, as a woman, it was the feeling of love greater than anyone in the entire world.

It was told in detail to her most beloved brother by a really detestable guy, described and interpreted as if she was like a female cat in heat.

That behavior could already be described as rape.

No, to Shizuku, she would probably prefer him tainting her body directly rather than saying those things.

That shame and humiliation completely messed up the dignity in Shizuku's heart.

“Stop.....it already.....”

Shizuku pleaded as her tears dripped down.

There was already no dignity or pride anymore—

Immediately after, the wall of the waiting room was blown away like an intense explosion.

“Uwa!?”

Amane screamed as he guarded his face from the burst of storm that suddenly occurred.

Shizuku's body was also assailed by the hot wind and the flash caused her to shut her eyes.

And after the blowing wind had died down, when she opened her eyes to see what exactly had happened—

She saw two people.

A red-haired knight stood at the big hole that had opened up on the wall in the waiting room.

It was the figure of the Crimson Princess, Stella Vermillion.

“Good. Looks like you are still breathing. Shizuku.”

After calling out to Shizuku, Stella leapt inside from the hole and landed in the waiting room.

Towards Stella's overly violent entrance, Amane...

“T-That surprised me! When I thought what happened, so it is Stella-chan. U-Uhh, I know that it's a topic that cannot be ignored Ikki-kun's lover, but breaking the wall to enter is really too lacking in common sense after all—”



Complained so...

“Quiet.”

“.....!?”

That complaint was.....stopped by Stella’s voice, which was soft, but allowed no room for rejection.

Stella spoke indifferently like that without turning towards Amane.

“Just try to defile Shizuku’s feelings right before my eyes again. I don’t care about the match or the event. I will turn you into charcoal right here so that you won’t spout nonsense ever again.”

No, it was not that she did not turn around, she could not turn around.

If Amane’s face entered her field of vision at that place—

.....Her anger that was being suppressed as she bit her lips to the point of almost bleeding would not be contained anymore.

(Stella.....san.....)

In her hazy vision, Shizuku thought that as she saw that expression of the approaching Stella.

If she could just follow her own desire, loving the person she loved, envying and hating the woman that snatched away her beloved like Amane said.....how much easier it would have been.

If, if only she was just a little bit more of a detestable woman.....

It would end without her coming to love that girl as it was currently.

The feeling of wanting to love her brother as a woman and the feeling of wanting her brother and that girl to obtain happiness as a family. The two feelings that were in contrast, but definitely not fake, they seemed to tear her apart yet did not.

“.....Th...ank.....you.....”

Shizuku was released from Amane's restraints by Stella.

In the instant her collapsed body was embraced, Shizuku mustered up the last of her strength and expressed her gratitude.

Was her gratitude conveyed?

Shizuku already could not find out.

Her consciousness fell into the darkness before she realized.

Part 2

After that, the Committee checked the surveillance camera and understood the whole disturbance in the waiting room.

.....Unbelievably, although the sound data was corrupted and their voices could not be heard, the image showed the instant that Shizuku Kurogane ambushed Amane Shinomiya in the waiting room, hence proving Amane's explanation to be correct.

With that, Shizuku was disqualified for the extremely malignant violation of rules.

It was decided that Amane Shinomiya would advance to the semi-finals.

However, the penalty for the accomplice of Shizuku, Arisuin, was fortunately stopped at 「Three months ban from participating in official matches and submission of a reflection essay」, it did not reach the point of expulsion.

It was probably because the Committee members, teachers, and even the staffs of the League held strong suspicion about Amane's aberrant consecutive wins without fighting.

However, despite being suspicious, nobody could prove that

causality relationship.

.....Anyway, the disturbance in the waiting room ended like that.

The turbulent third round had lowered its curtain, and the best four that would appear in the semi-finals of the event had been decided.

Part 3

And in the night of that day.

After visiting Shizuku Kurogane and Nagi Arisuin who were still unconscious, Ikki Kurogane went to the park next to the hotel for training.

The content was very ordinary.

It was just cutting apart a block that stood on the ground.

Ikki arranged his breathing and swung his weapon.

A sharp slash sound that severed the atmosphere of the night.

Each time, the block was cut apart like a test for laido^[1].

When the block that was around his height had been shortened to about the height of his waist, Ikki stopped.

“Fuu.....haa.”

At the same time, sweat flowed down from Ikki's forehead like waterfall.

That was how much concentration he poured into those

numerous slashes.

However, that was only natural.

The weapon Ikki was holding in his hands was.....not his Device.

It was just...a piece of paper.

It was a piece of copier paper that was sold everywhere.

That's right, he straightened the soft paper and sharply swung it like a blade without bending its edge, and cut the wooden material that was much harder than the paper.

Not to mention, his training would not end with just that.

After Ikki wiped away his sweat and fixed his breathing, the next thing that stood on the ground was not a block, but a metal pipe, and he repeated the same action.

With paper, he cut metal.

The world was forced to acknowledge that beyond-the-common-sense scene with his body technique reaching the superhuman realm.

However, it was still too difficult for Ikki, who could manipulate his body to that extent...

“Ah.”

In the next instant, by a little, really just by a little bit, the night breeze got stronger. In the middle of cutting the metal pipe, a small tearing sound came from the paper.

The paper blade reacted to the caress of the night breeze and went crooked.

Ikki sighed at that failure and combed up his sweat-drenched hair.

“No good. I was too concentrated on my body control. I need to notice the changes in the external factors as well.”

And, at that moment.

“That’s quite an unusual training.”

A familiar voice called out.

As he turned around, underneath the lighting from the street light, his most beloved walked towards him.

“Stella.....”

“That, what kind of training is it?”

“It’s a training to control my body accurately. Thanks to imitating Edelweiss-san’s sword technique, my battle strength has raised quite a bit.....but I have not mastered that sword technique yet.”

Originally, Edelweiss’s sword technique was a sword technique that did not produce any sound.

It converted all the energy generated from every action purely into movement and attack power without any loss or deviation, a godly technique that would not cause even the tiniest bit of vibration in the atmosphere.

However, Ikki’s Blade Steal had not reached that realm yet.

His movements still had a lot of energy loss and deviation.

“This training is to let my body make precise movements for the sake of not causing any loss or deviation. If I am able to use Edelweiss’s sword technique, using paper to cut metal will be a piece of cake. Just.....that alone is not enough. No matter how accurately I move my body, if I don’t read the changes in the external factors and correspond to them, a loss will still happen as a result. That’s why.....”

As he cut off his explanation, Ikki picked up a piece of copier paper from the bundle next to his feet, pinched it between his fingers and threw it like a shuriken.

The thrown copier paper flew through the air horizontally, dug into the metal pipe that stood on the ground for a few centimeters, before bending from its softness.

“In the end, if the objects that left my hand can avoid any energy loss, able to cut it into two.....sound should be erased from my sword.”

“That’s an amazing godly technique.....”

“Yes. She’s incredible, Edelweiss-san that is.....It seems that I am still far from catching up with her.”

Stella had no words to reply to Ikki’s remark, as she believed that it was already quite a godly technique as it was.

Towards the silent Stella, Ikki...

“Thank you for just now.”

Stopped his training, and expressed his gratitude.

Stella tilted her head.

“What about just now?”

“About saving Shizuku. If I had arrived first, I think I might have attacked him after all.”

“Aah, I see. You don’t really have to thank me.....It’s not something that I can forgive either.”

Stella did not think so much about the details like whether there might have been bigger trouble had Ikki arrived first back then.

It was simply to silence that guy even a second faster.

That.....mouth of the insensitive guy who spouted thoughtless remarks selfishly.

Stella was.....definitely not intimate with Shizuku.

There were many conflicts in their daily lives.

Since they loved the same man, it couldn’t be helped in a sense.

However, because of that, she was able to understand.

That was just how deep she had been thinking about Ikki.

That’s why—

“.....Umm, Ikki. About Shizuku, what that guy had said was.....”

Stella intended to follow up about the thoughtless remarks of Amane.

However, Ikki stopped her.

“It’s alright. I understand.”

“Eh.....”

“.....Since she’s being that straightforward, even I can tell. About Shizuku harbouring affection towards me not as a brother, but for someone of the opposite sex. However.....at the same time, I also know that it’s not just that. Shizuku has harboured much more than that towards me.”

That was not just the affection towards someone of the opposite sex like Amane had said.

It was a lot of affection that was much more, much greater, to the point of him feeling guilty.

As a little sister, as a friend, as a mother, as a father, as a woman—

As just a single person, she had poured Ikki with all the affection that he had not been able to receive.

“Really, she’s a wonderful child that I do not deserve.”

She was his prided and most beloved little sister.

If it was for her sake, he would probably do anything.

He was certain of it.

“Amane-kun has hurt that Shizuku.”

That was not something forgivable.

He had no intention of forgiving him.

“I will absolutely make him pay.....With my own hands, absolutely.....!”

Azure flame-like anger seethed quietly in his pupils, Ikki threw the new piece of copier paper in his hand.

It pierced deeper into the metal pipe than before.

“Is that so.....Then it’s fine. If Ikki has properly understood it then.”

Hearing Ikki’s words, knowing that he did not misunderstand, Stella sighed in relief.

Ikki smiled at Stella behaving that way.

“You’re gentle, Stella.”

Hearing that, Stella's cheeks blushed and she looked away.

"C-Caring about my future little sister is only natural as a sister-in-law!"

As they were usually at odds, it was probably awkward to make her honestly admit her goodwill towards Shizuku.

That dishonest gentleness again made Ikki smile out of her loveliness.

"G-Geez. Then I'm going back. It will be bad to interrupt your training any further, and I also have a match tomorrow."

"Got it. Tomorrow is finally the semi-finals after all."

"Yeah. We have finally reached here."

That's right, finally.

Soon, they would be fulfilling the promise from that day.

"Tomorrow is a critical moment for both of us. Both of our opponents are formidable."

"Fuun. Just what I wanted. I will be paying him back with interest for what he did that day."

“.....My brother, Ouma-san is strong. Probably, the strongest opponent Stella has fought so far.”

“I suppose. However—”

Stopping halfway, Stella grabbed a few pieces of copier paper next to Ikki and crushed them into a ball with her hands. And then—

“I have become even stronger than that.”

As she said it to him — magic power boiled from her entire body.

Incandescent and hot wind blew out.

Amongst that sweltering heat storm, Ikki saw Stella’s back.

—The phantom of a huge dragon.

(This...is.....!)

Immediately after, Stella threw the balled up paper towards the standing metal pipe.

The instant the paper ball hit, the metal pipe was split into two as if being torn apart, and the paper ball dug into the concrete wall of the park behind it without losing momentum.

Even Ikki was speechless.

“.....That was unexpected.”

An object with the mass of a paper ball.

Just how much strength would be needed to throw it to cause that phenomenon.

Ikki could not begin to imagine.

Towards that surprised Ikki, Stella...

“.....My match is first tomorrow. I will be waiting for you at the final round first, Ikki.”

After she glanced at him with her crimson pupils burning with fighting spirit, she left the park.

Her back showed definite confidence.

From the special training by Nene Saikyou, Stella had obtained great power without a doubt.

—However, at the same time, when Ikki had faced off against Ouma before, he had come into contact with his strength.

The strength of that power which supported him was also

way beyond common sense.

A winning candidate of the current event.

The monstrous showdown between two rare A-Rank knights would probably be very intense.

In that case, the root to the strength of Stella's body might be revealed.

—He looked forward to it. Truly.

However...

“Umm, Stella. It's a little hard to say when you tried to leave after displaying your coolness.....here.....since it's a public park.....I think that it's a bad idea to selfishly break things.”

“.....I-I will confess to the Municipal Office on phone tomorrow.....”

She probably thought that she went overboard herself as well.

Stella did not turn back, but her ears were dyed red in shame.

Well, it was just because of excessive force, not because she aimed at the wall purposely. Various facilities around the

hotel, including the park, allowed contenders participating in the event to use them as training locations with limited use of magic, so she probably wouldn't be punished.

“Now then.....I should resume my training. Since today.....I probably won't be returning to the hotel.”

After Stella left, Ikki fixed his mood and put another block up.

And, at that moment.

“My oh my, how incredible. I have lived a long life, but it's the first time I see a person able to dig a paper ball into concrete. Not to mention it's a stray ball, how scary.”

A voice that gave off a gentle impression, but could definitely feel a solid core within it somewhere.

(Eh.....)

Ikki knew that voice.

He had not heard it directly before, but.....he had heard it many times.

That's only natural. That voice was—

The voice of that country's Prime Minister.

Part 4

“P-Prime Minister Tsukikage.....!”

Bakuga Tsukikage showed up on the opposite side from the direction Stella had taken.

Being the Prime Minister of Japan, he was their fateful opponent, as well as the Chief Executive of Akatsuki Academy.

With an opponent that he had never thought possible to meet showing up, Ikki was visibly shaken.

In contrast, Tsukikage was...

“You have really grown up, Ikki-kun.”

He walked closer to Ikki and loosened his cheeks.

“.....Have we met somewhere before?”

“It can’t be helped that you don’t remember. When Ryoumasan was still alive, I had once gone to Itsuki-kun to discuss about the Council Election, it was then that I had passed by you.”

Ikki was convinced by those words.

He had heard from brother Ouma that his father, Itsuki, was also involved in the founding of the National Akatsuki Academy.

Then, it would not be strange for Tsukikage to visit the Kurogane Household.

“That’s how it is.....Then I apologize for my rudeness.”

While it couldn’t be helped that it was something he didn’t remember, Ikki gradually retreated backwards and kept Tsukikage in sight with caution.

In response to that, Tsukikage smiled bitterly.

“Haha.....Even if you aren’t so cautious, an old non-combat type Blazer like me also can’t do anything to you.”

Certainly, based on his observation alone, he could not feel any battle power from Tsukikage.

His magic power was pretty high, but it was not to the degree of threatening.

However, even if that’s the case...

“Not being cautious is impossible. You are the leader of the enemies to us.....And I cannot think of it as a coincidence to

meet at this timing and place. There's also the part where you waited for Stella to be gone before showing up."

Tsukikage nodded deeply to Ikki's words.

"Well, true, it's not a coincidence.....Actually, there's one thing I want to talk about with you."

"With me.....?"

"Aah. Can you spare a little of your time? It's not a long talk."

"I refuse."

"An immediate answer, huh. So cold."

"You should also know, right? The power of Amane-kun who is my opponent for tomorrow.....I don't know what kind of effect his Nameless Glory may have on me right at this moment. I can't accept an invitation from the enemy's leader under such circumstances."

If it was only to the extent of Tsukikage attacking alone, he could probably handle it easily.

However, ever since it was decided that Ikki would be fighting against Amane in the semi-finals, he had been cautious of his Nameless Glory.

It was only natural. The reason was because, in order to fight against Amane, he had to first endure through the causality interference from Nameless Glory and reach the ring that would decide the victor of the semi-final.

He had to maintain caution in order to handle any unforeseen incident.

That's why Ikki decided to wait till the next morning without sleeping that night.

He went to the park not only because of training. In a place with a wide range of sight, it would be easier to handle unforeseen incidents, as well as not to be buried alive in case of an earthquake.

Since he had already been so thorough, there was no reason to invite risk at that late hour.

Tsukikage groaned admirably after hearing Ikki's reply.

"I see. That's a good answer. You have trained, fought, and thought well.....Shinguuji-kun must also be glad to have a student like you."

He praised such a cautious Ikki. However, he continued to speak.

“But you don’t have to worry about that.....That’s because it will be impossible for you to fight against Shinomiya-kun as it is now.”

“——Eh?”

Unable to comprehend Tsukikage’s words immediately, Ikki asked back.

“Is that...about me losing without a fight?”

Tsukikage shook his head.

“No. It’s not like that. He won’t make you lose without fighting. He won’t be satisfied with just that. Because Shinomiya-kun’s hatred is much deeper than you think. And then.....my talk is none other than about that. It’s about Shinomiya-kun. How about it? Do you...have a little interest now? Hmm?”

“.....——”

At that instant, Ikki understood.

He already had no other choice.

Negotiation was not something that could only be carried out after reaching the table.

It was something that was already finished before reaching the table.

An experienced politician like Bakuga Tsukikage understood that.

Ikki had no choice but to listen to him.

“.....I understand. I will listen to what you have to say.”

“Thank you.”

Chapter 12 - Clash Between Two Dragons

破軍学園壁新聞

キャラクターピックアップス

文責・日下部加々美

MOMIJI ASAGI

浅木 栞

■PROFILE

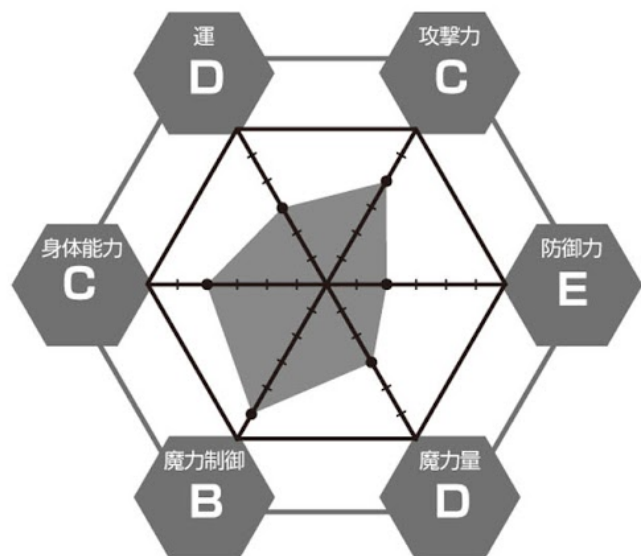
所属：武曲学園三年

伐刀者ランク：C

伐刀絶技：紅蓮蜚局

二つ名：鬼火

人物概要：昨年度七星剣武祭三位



かがみんチェック！

オーソドックスな炎使いで、我らが生徒会長《雷切》東堂刀華さんと同じ《闘神》門下の学生騎士だよ。

彼女の《抜き足》は《雷切》を超える精度を誇っていて、《抜き足》で間合いを詰めてからの炎を纏わせた斬撃が彼女の好むコンビネーションだね。ちなみに彼女は相手に付いた炎の扱いを相当練習してるらしく、彼女の炎は一度着火すると蛇のようにうねって敵の身体に巻き付くよ。

HAGUN ACADEMY WALL NEWSPAPER

Character Topics ____ Writer • Kagami Kusakabe

Momiji Asagi

■ PROFILE

Affiliation: Bukyoku Academy, Year Three

Blazer Rank: C

Noble Art: Guren Kenkyoku

Nickname: Demon Flame

Personal Summary: Last year's Sword-Art Festival third place

Attribute chart (starting at far left, going clockwise)

Physical Ability: C

Luck: D

Offensive Power: C

Defensive Power: E

Magic Capacity: D

Magic Control: B

Kagamin Check!

An orthodox fire-user, and a student knight trained under the God of War just like our student council president "Raikiri" Touka Toudou. She boasts a Trackless Step with greater precision than Raikiri's, and prefers using it to get inside an opponent's guard and then dealing out attacks wreathed in flame. By the way, she seems to seriously train in attaching fire to her opponents, and once her flame ignites, it winds around an enemy's body like a snake.

Part 1

The sixty-second Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival, day three.

The summer sun was shining onto the ground even more mercilessly than the previous day.

However, it paled in comparison to the heat enveloping the event venue.

「Temperature 35°C, humidity 70%!

Thank you all for coming here despite the burning hot sun!

We have reached the semi-finals of the sixty-second Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival!

The national best four participants that have climbed up all the way to this point will be clashing against one another!

Amongst these strong people, that are a cut or two above the rest, who will obtain the ticket to the final battle!?

Everyone, have you prepared well against dehydration!?
Well-prepared, right!?

—Then, let's welcome the contenders for the first match of

the semi-finals!」

In line with the announcer Iida's words, cheers raised from the venue.

Under the rain of applause, with flowing crimson hair, Stella appeared on the semi-final stage.

「First, from the red gate, Contender Crimson Princess, Stella Vermillion has shown up!

As the second Imperial Princess of the Vermillion Empire, even amongst the mage-knights belonging to the member nations of the League, she is a genius boasting the highest magic power!

She had almost lost her qualification in the first round due to an incident on the railway^[2], but she faced against all of the contenders in B-Block at the same time, overwhelmed them, and brilliantly cleared the late penalty! She has advanced to the semi-finals in one fell swoop!

The power which can even destroy this venue itself can be described as top-notch!

That strength, living up to the previous evaluation, is without a doubt the top on the list of winning candidates!

She is genius knight like a shining star of the current era!

Will she be able to reach the summit of the Seven Stars with this momentum!?!」

「Princess Stella————! Do your best————!」

「Kyaa—! Stella-sama~! Please look over here~~!」

「There are two matches today, so please don't break the venue too much————!」

Voices of support, regardless of gender, directed towards Stella on the ring.

Stella was very popular amongst both genders.

The strength of a knight that possessed the world's highest magic power.

The social position as the second Imperial Princess of Vermillion Empire.

In addition, since she was a peerless beauty, it was only natural.

And Ikki, who was more fascinated by Stella than anyone else, sent her claps of encouragement while his eyes were

robbed by the dignified side profile of the dauntless girl.

At that moment.

A voice suddenly called out from behind Ikki.

“Stella-san has a nice expression.”

“Eh?”

It was a voice he was so used to hearing that he could not forget it.

Surprised, he turned back, and there was...

“T-Toudou-san! And Toutokubara-san as well!”

Chestnut-colored hair tied in a three-strand-braid, a girl with gentle demeanour, Raikiri, Touka Toudou, and a tall girl holding a parasol, a friend of Touka, Scharlach Frau, Kanata Toutokubara were standing there.

“Fufu, long time no see, Kurogane-san.”

“Y-Yeah, really. The two of you have come to Osaka?”

“Yes. We took the Shinkansen with Saikyou-sensei this morning. We want to watch it from the side even if it’s only for the semi-finals.”

“Is your body alright already?”

He asked Touka who was still unconscious just the other day.

Touka responded with an energetic nod.

“Yeah. I have already recovered completely. I slept so much that I am too energetic now. Uta-kun said that he still felt languid so he stayed back at the Academy to laze around.”

“Vice President has not recovered yet?”

“You don’t have to worry about him. In Uta-kun’s case, he doesn’t have much physical strength because he only plays games every day. He reaps what he sowed.”

“Fufu, Vice President is frail after all.”

The two girls giggled facing each other.

Judging from that appearance, he certainly did not need to worry anymore.

“Kurogane-kun, is it alright if we watch the battle together?”

“Yeah, of course.”

There was no reason to refuse.

Ikki slightly tilted his body to give way to the two.

And then, as that was happening, Stella's opponent showed himself.



「Up next, from the blue gate, A-Block's champion, Contender Sword Emperor of Wind, Ouma Kurogane enters!

Contender Ouma has one-sidedly overwhelmed his opponents from the first round to third round!

His strength and mercilessness are already tested and guaranteed!

We have received information that he had defeated Contender Stella unofficially before!

If Contender Stella is the favorite of this event, then the one who could rival her is none other than him!

He is an A-Rank knight from Japan who is boasted in the world! How will he fare against an international celebrity!?

This confrontation between A-Ranks is totally unpredictable!」

Ouma was wrapped in pressure like a drawn blade.

With his arrival, the audience held their breaths.

「He's still the same.....his fighting spirit seems to split you open just from looking.....」

「I'm scared.....」

「Though that's the case, since the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival is still Japan's event, I wish that he will do his best.」

The cheers for Ouma's entrance was much lesser compared to Stella.

It was probably the expected lingering effect from the shocking ending of the match against Panzer Grizzly, Renji Kaga from the day before.

The Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival was a competition with lives on the line. The participants risked their pride and lives to challenge it after acknowledging that they could die from losing. However, that was the principle of the Mage-Knight. For the audience, who did not have such resolve, drawing back was understandable.

「And, we have invited the mage-knight currently ranked third in the world, Yaksha Princess, Nene Saikyou-sensei to be the commentator for the semi-finals! Saikyou-sensei, please take care of us today.」

「Hmm~ Nice to meet you~」

「How is it? The two contenders' condition seen from Saikyou-sensei's, Japan's highest ranked mage-knight's, point of view

is...」

「Both are in high spirits. Feels like they are really motivated. Even so, they are not too tensed up. Both of them are in the best condition—」

「I see. This match has become a confrontation between two A-Ranks, but at this moment, which one of them does Saikyou-sensei think has the greater power?」

「Kuku.....Don't be in such a rush, Onii-chan. Nobody likes impatient people, you know?」

Saikyou snapped close the folding fan in her hand...

「.....Those two will immediately give you that answer.」

After replying so, she opened her fan again and gave a meaningful smile.

(Now, Stella-chan. That guy is different from those brats in the first round. He is someone you can fight with at your full strength.....Give him the shock of his life, with the new power you obtained from the training with me.)

Before long, Ouma also stood on top of the ring, at the start line.

At the same time, the audience shut their mouths, and

silence fell over the venue.

In that silence, the announcer Iida — pulled the trigger of the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival Semi-Final.

「Both contenders are at the starting line! And now, the first match of the semi-finals begins!

LET'S GO AHEAD——!!!!」

Part 2

After receiving the starting signal, the first to move was.....Ouma.

“We aren’t close enough to chit chat before meeting death. Let’s begin immediately.”

Murmuring with a tone as if he was talking to himself, he slanted his body and stretched his right arm backwards.

And then his magic power compressed into his right hand...

“Snarl. —*Ryuuzume*.”

He manifested the essence of his soul.

It possessed a blade a little longer than that of a Japanese katana, belonging to the Nodachi type of sword.

That was Ouma’s Device, *Ryuuzume*.

“First is to see how much you have grown from back then. I will confirm it with my own sword.”

“.....If you can, that is.”

Ouma returned Stella's provocation with action.

He sank his slanted stance and — dashed out.

「Ooh! Contender Ouma, who had been nonchalant in every match so far, makes the first move! The hem of his kimono flutters up as he closes in on Contender Stella in one straight line! How will Contender Stella intercept him!?!」

The proactive Ouma who was clearly different from the matches up till then raised a commotion in the venue.

However, Stella was unshaken from that unexpected start...

“Serve me. *Lævateinn*.”

She manifested her own Device in response to the fast-approaching Ouma.

However, what she made out of her magic power — was not just the sword.

「Th-This is! Contender Stella! Spheres with burning heat appeared behind her! A-And what an incredible number!」

And then, Stella swung her *Lævateinn* like a conductor's baton.

“Burn to dust. —Broken Arrow.”

She ordered the super hot spheres exceeding a hundred behind her back.

Answering that command, the flame spheres waiting in air behind Stella shot out with vigor, becoming arrows of light to assault the Sword Emperor of Wind.

The carpet bombing of intense heat that would bury everything within the width of the ring approached.

Stella's overwhelming magic power that nobody could catch up to, did not leave any gaps for Ouma to evade...

「D-Direct hiit! The flame swepted the ring and raised black smoke!」

Furthermore, it did not stop with one hit.

More arrows of flame rained down onto the location where the flames had swallowed Ouma.

Explosive noise and conflagration. Not a single person in the venue could see Ouma's figure anymore.

It was not unreasonable.

What Stella used was an excessive violence to defeat a single person.

However—

「However, it doesn't seem to be effective.」

—Even so, the opponent was the Sword Emperor of Wind.

Right after Saikyou murmured so.

Breaking through the flame and dust from Stella's simultaneous firing, Ouma's figure showed up.

There was not a speck of soot on his clothes.

He did not mind the incoming bombing, and broke through from the center by using his power to control the wind to take it on. He did not decelerate at all, rather, he was approaching Stella while accelerating.

—I won't be stopped by such fireworks.

The gaze behind his bangs swaying in the storm was telling her that.

Towards that gaze of Ouma...

“Empress Dress.”

Stella also responded with another move.

Holding *Lævateinn* upright tightly in her hand, her whole body wrapped in flame, she stepped forward herself.

「Contender Stella has wrapped herself in a dress of flame! The heat is burning the atmosphere to the extent of twisting her surrounding scenery!」

Stella's flame, Dragon Breath, had a temperature of three thousand degrees Celsius.

Not to mention a direct hit, just entering its range would cause the skin to be burned to crisp.

However—

「However, Contender Ouma isn't stopping! He dashed into the zone of burning air!」

「That's cause Ouma-chan's ability is 「Wind」 after all. Since it's conductive heat, so he just needs to make a vacuum heat insulating wall to prevent the heat from transmitting through. Rather than that — the audience-chan sitting at the front most row should brace themselves.」

「Brace themselves?」

At the instant the announcer felt confused about what that meant, it happened.

Stella and Ouma, the Devices those two swung clashed...

—The noise produced from the clash, which exceeded the realm of sound and could only be described as shockwave, slammed the whole dome with a physical impact.

「「UWAaAAAAAAAAAAAA~::~~!!」」

The audience leaning next to the fence were blown back by the 「sound」 of the clash between the swords of those two and landed on their bottoms.

Furthermore, it did not end with just one strike.

Second time, third time—

Every time the flaming red sword and jade wind blade crossed each other, the fence would squeak, and the glass windows would vibrate.

「I-It stiiings! T-This is what you call the sound of swords clashing!? It's just like the explosive noise and shockwave from a collision between high speed jet planes!」

However, despite releasing so much energy, the two people at the epicenter did not retreat a single step, and continued to clash their swords.

And after crossing for about ten times—

A loud explosive sound, as if ten streaks of lightning struck down, echoed, blowing both of them towards the edges of the ring at the same time.

Neither of them had landed a hit.

They were on even grounds. At a frighteningly high level.

And that — proved that Stella had filled the gap in the difference between herself and Ouma in a short period of time.

“As expected of Stella-chan.”

Having witnessed the first contact of those two, Kanata leaked out her admiration.

“With this, it doesn’t seem that she will lose in strength like before.”

Ikki nodded at that.

“Yeah. Not to mention that Stella has not shown her seriousness yet. She is still going to increase her pace.”

That’s right. She should still be able to increase her pace.

It was possible to imagine from the potential Stella had shown in the first round.

However, she still had something.

—First round, and yesterday night, he saw the phantom of a dragon in that split second.

Stella had not shown the root, the source of that yet.

She was still holding back her power.

However—

“But Ouma-san also has not shown his seriousness yet.”

Touka interrupted Ikki’s words.

Just like she said, Ouma was not serious as well.

In that first contact, both of them were only ascertaining each other.

The enemy before their eyes, taking on their full power.....an opponent that would not break from it.

And that was something that Ikki, as the little brother, knew the best in that place.

(Certainly, Nii-san is not someone who will get serious regardless of his opponent.)

He would choose an opponent that was worthy for his seriousness.

And right then.....that greeting and confirmation had been completed.

—It would start from there.

(From now on is the real.....battle.)

Part 3

“I see. As expected of your power. To be able to match my sword straight on.”

Ouma praised Stella’s ability as numbness remained in his own arm.

Because he had not experienced a clashing of swords for a long time.

However—

“However, it’s only at the level of numbing my arm. This much won’t be enough to take my life.”

Ouma’s expression clearly showed that he had room to spare as he told her.

Stella pouted in displeasure.

“.....You’re still quite carefree, huh.”

Well, she was once defeated by him.

At the moment, Ouma was still above her.

That probably couldn’t be helped.

That's why, Stella held up *Lævateinn* right before her...

"I will draw out the bloodthirst from that composed face first."

She injected more magic power into the Dragon Breath flame enveloping her blade.

"HAAaAAAAAAAAAaAAaaa!!!!"

With Stella's magic power, the flame enveloping the sword swelled.

The crimson flame rampaged about without limit as its temperature and brightness increased.

That appearance caused Touka Toudou to recall.

"That's...during the training camp.....!"

That's right. It was the long-distance shot Stella had shown Touka during their mock battle.

It was the preparation for Dragon Fang.

Though the motion was the same, the intense heat from the sword could not be compared.

However, that was only natural.

That's because it was a big technique that was going to fire off seven shots of the Noble Art, Dragon Fang, which held destructive power that Touka Toudou's Raikiri could barely intercept, simultaneously!

"Devour and scatter! Satan Fang——!"

Immediately, seven shots, no, seven flame dragons with heads flew out from *Lævateinn*.

And their jaws, lined with flame teeth, assaulted Ouma from various angles to devour him.

However, even as the scene of destruction was right before him, Ouma's expression did not change...

"Just this technique alone requires who knows how many normal Blazer's magic power to do it. Quite impressive.....But, how will just the level of a few snakes scare me?"

As he said so, he stabbed *Ryuuzume* into the ring...

"Fuujiin Kekkai."

He activated the Noble Art that protected the audience stand from Stella's Bahamut Howl during the first round battle.

Tornado stirred up in his surrounding, and that blade of wind tore up the incoming flame dragons into specks of dust.

The flame dragons that were sliced up until they became tiny incandescent drew a spiral as they were rolled into the wind that rose up to the sky, and disappeared.

And Ouma, who had easily overwhelmed Stella's full-powered long distance shots, did not change his expression as expected...

"Is that all you got? Crimson Princess."

As he spoke to Stella before his eyes...—he noticed.

The instant Satan Fang covered his sight, Stella's figure disappeared from the ring.

And, the moment he realized it, it was too late—

"It's something like this.....! Sword Emperor of Wind!"

A red-haired girl appeared from the heat haze-like rippled space behind Ouma, and swung her sword at his neck.

Flame Veil.

It was Stella's Noble Art which bent the light rays with heat to make her opponent unable to see her own body.

That's right. Ouma had misjudged the knight known as Stella.

She was not a knight that could only rely on her magic power capacity and attack with quantity.

Stealing his sight with that destructive power, making him think that Stella was attack specialized, but her style was an extremely competent all-rounder.

Her usage of magic was so varied that even Shizuku could not be a match.

Then Stella devised a tactic from that variety and brilliantly got behind Ouma...

"HAaAaa!"

Slashed diagonally down at the defenseless Ouma.

Right after that...

"N-Not good!"

At the same time Touka's shout echoed, red drops sprayed

onto the ring like a blooming red flower.

Part 4

The owner of the blood that splashed the ring was...—Stella who slashed diagonally down.

「Contender Stella is injured! Sword Emperor of Wind has finally captured Crimson Princess with his sword! Blood is spraying out from the two arms of Contender Stella! The opening hit belongs to Contender Sword Emperor of Wind, Ouma Kuroganeeee!」

A turning point occurred between the evenly matched offense and defense between the two.

Voices of grief came from the venue due to the obvious difference in power in that effective attack.

However, the injured person herself did not press down on her wounds.

Did she not care?

No. The shock, to the point of making her unconscious of her wounds, caused her to freeze up.

(What...is this.....!?)

Stella's expression was of incomprehensiveness.

It wasn't unreasonable.

Ouma read the surprise attack from the back, and returned with a slash...—she would be convinced if that was the case.

However.....it was not so.

Stella's diagonal slash definitely settled it.

Lævateinn had certainly hit Ouma's shoulder.

Even so...—her blade could not advance any more than that.

Touka bit her teeth as someone who had experienced the same phenomenon before.

It turned out like that after all. As she thought.

“The danger of Sword Emperor of Wind is not just his offense.....Even though there isn't much difference in magic power, he was able to receive my slash attack without any wound like just now. What exactly is that unexplainable defensive power.....”

Touka questioned what exactly that was.

In response to that...—Ikki, who was next to her, spoke.

“That itself is not so unexplainable. It is out of the norm, though.”

Touka’s eyes opened her eyes wide at those words.

“K-Kurogane-kun knows something? The mystery behind that defensive power.”

Ikki nodded at that question.

“Previously, I had a chance to cross swords with him. I noticed it back then.”

He was assaulted on the way back from Yuudai Moroboshi’s invitation to his family shop.

Ikki came into contact with Ouma’s 「Abnormality」 in that instance.

And he saw through its true form.

“Stella will probably notice it after one more strike. But—”

Ikki’s words stopped there.

The reason was because, there was nothing he could do even if he noticed it.

It was just as what Ouma had said.

His power was...—not a 「Technique」 against which a strategy could be formed.

And, just at that moment...—his prediction came true.

The two people on the ring crossed swords again.

After clashing a number of times, Ouma thrust out like a released arrow.

Stella turned her body as if dancing and evaded that...

She hit a counter horizontally at his body with not just her own power, but also using her opponent's power on the second time.

That horizontal line cleaning dug into Ouma's body...—and stopped at that.

“You're...kidding.....!”

“Fuun.”

“——!!!!”

Ouma dished out a kick at Stella's flank when she stopped her movement in shock.

Stella's body danced in the air as she was blown more than ten meters away.

“Cough...cough! Ugh.....!”

Stella winced as she kneeled in pain as if her internal organs were blended.

What spilled out from her mouth was blood.

Ouma's kick broke through Stella's sturdy magic defense that defended against the slash attack from The Unturning, Yui Tatara's Device in one hit, damaging her internal organs.

The shockwave was like getting hit by a battering ram.

However—

That was how it was, it was natural in that case, Stella was convinced.

The feeling of hitting a rock mountain after the two strikes, and the damage to her flank.

From all that information.....Stella noticed Ouma's 「Abnormality」.

“I can't believe it.....What's with your body.....!”

The shaking in her voice was probably not just from her wounded side.

In response to that, Ouma—

“Fuu.....As expected, you noticed after two strikes.”

Ouma let out a sparse smile and answered Stella’s doubt.

“You want to ask what this is, right? This is...—my resolve.”

Part 5

“It’s a story from five years ago.

In my last year as an elementary student, I, who had dominated the U-12 World Tournament organized by the League of Mage-Knight Nations, was on the contrary feeling gloomy about the result.”

He noticed after dominating the world.

By striking with just the back of his sword, the path would not open for him.

Even when he went to the world tournament, there was something that still could not exceed the realm of 「Training」.

“This kind of childish tournament could not let me test my limit.

I was unable to overcome it.

—I was in agony.

To stay in an environment like a lukewarm bath during my growth period.....it was unacceptable to stay there for at least three more years when it was the period during which I could grow as much as I wanted.”

To be even stronger, to reach even higher.

To Ouma, who continued to seek it more than anyone, that stagnation was unbearable.

He had always been challenging his body's limits and wishing for power to unleash.

“That's why I.....flew out of Japan, the League, to seek it.”

The real battles that he sought existed in the world.

Sometimes in the streets of slums.

Sometimes in an underground colosseum.

Sometimes in the battlefield with bullets flying everywhere.

Ouma Kurogane had obtained the places he wished for, and was engrossed in studying.

He remembered how fulfilling that period of time was.

Amongst the battles with his life on the stake, he dreamily remembered how his body was being forged day by day.

If he stayed like that, if he continued on that path, he could become the world's strongest knight.

He did not hold a speck of doubt.

However.....

“That thought did not continue for long. I had an encounter. On my path of warrior’s training, at the end of this world, with a real demon living there.”

“Demon.....?”

“Tyrant.....That name, the princess of a country should probably know about it.”

“——!”

The nickname spoken by Ouma.

The venue showed incomprehension, but Stella’s crimson pupils widened in shock.

Just like what Ouma said, as the royalty of a member nation in the League, Stella knew that name.

Of course she would know.

That was.....the arch nemesis of the International Society, Rebellion.

It was the name that people living in the underworld called their Leader by, just like a Blazer's nickname.

"Don't tell me, you fought.....!?"

Ouma nodded.

"I was pulverized.....Even though I exerted every ounce of my strength, I could not even resist a single moment."

It was only natural.

That opponent was an incarnation of violence that continued to reign at the summit of the underworld since more than half a century ago.

There was a gap between them so huge that he could not understand just how large that difference was.

Ouma, who knew his powerless self, could only beg for his life shamelessly.

However, Tyrant was not a man who would listen to such words.

His strength could not reach, his pleas could not reach, only violence continued to rain down on him.

"Just remembering it.....causes my entire body to tremble in

fear. I have never felt the despair known as death so near to me.....No, if Twin-Wings had not come to my rescue, I probably would've been killed for real.

And then, after coming into contact with the territory at the summit of the world where the demonic being lived, and my own powerless self, I was able to understand.....Even if I just train as how I had been training, even if I advanced down the path I had been advancing on, my pace would not let me reach the summit.”

His lifespan would be too short for him to reach there with his current pace. As such.

“In that case.....there was already no meaning in training anymore. Normal training was useless. What I needed was.....an evolution to obtain wings that let me fly towards the summit instead of walking on the path!”

In an instant, Ouma grasped the upper part of his kimono...

“Tenryuu Gusoku — Release.”^[3]

And took it off.

Immediately after that, an invisible shockwave hit Stella and then the venue itself.

It had blown Stella off to the edge of the ring, bent the fence surrounding the venue, and shattered all the windows facing the ring. A choir of screams resounded.

Stella drew her breath at that scene.

Just then, Ouma had definitely said 'release'. In other words, that amount of air was not generated right in that moment—

“Don’t tell me, you, with that absurdly large amount of air.....have you been suppressing yourself with that until now!?”

Ouma wordlessly affirmed her.

That’s right. The explosion of air that knocked Stella just then, everything was a high-pressure shackle that had been binding Ouma until a moment ago. He used his Noble Art, Tenryuu Gusoku, which repelled enemy attacks by wearing it, against himself, and burdened his body constantly with an out-of-norm load.

“For what reason, are you doing that.....”

“Of course, for the sake of 「Evolution」.”

Evolution was a fundamental ability that living things possessed in order to adapt to the environment. For example,

something similar to webbing might appear from a human who had been constantly swimming since he was young.

Ouma administered himself to a harsh environment that pushed his body to the limit, forcefully triggering his body's ability. It was for the sake of obtaining a physical body that could withstand any attack, and a power that could beat any enemy down.

However, even if living things were equipped with the ability to evolve, it was normal for it to take a long time. Naturally, he couldn't do it easily.

A human body under that level of pressure would not remain unscathed.

The pressure suppressed him from all directions, he couldn't even lift a finger.

His flesh was squashed, his bones were smashed.

His organs could not function properly due to external pressure.

Of course, he could not fight in that condition, and continued to lose.

He was beaten, slashed, pierced, burned by enemies that he

could effortlessly win against in the past—.....

However.....even so, he did not cease his recklessness.

Because he knew that he had to do it in order to reach the territory of that demonic being.

He continued to force his battered body without mercy.

If he was pressed to death by his own power, he could only go that far.

“And then.....when countless wounds were carved onto my entire body, this recklessness paid off.”

His body gradually, in order to adapt to the environment he set on himself, began to evolve.

His bone structure increased its hardness to be like an iron core in order not to lose against the pressure suppressing him, his organs pulsed strongly in order to let blood circulate his entire body. Each and every muscle fibre of his body became stronger and more tenacious in order to let him move smoothly under high pressure.....eventually, when his body could not feel the 「Pressure」 anymore — Ouma's body literally transformed into 「Steel」.

“You may not see it from the compacted external

appearance, but just like the feedback from your hand, my weight, with muscle and bone density tens of times higher than a normal person, is way heavier than Panzer Grizzly. A lukewarm slash will never injure me.”

And then—

“And so right now, I have released those shackles. Do you know what this means?”

“~~~~~!.”

Stella hurriedly held up her sword from those words, but...

“Too slow.”

“Kuh—”

The stone plate ring crumbled under Ouma’s kick off, and he shortened the distance between the two in just one step.

Next, he swung his wind-wrapped sword three times before any interference.

Three flashes of slash, accompanied by the groan of atmosphere, assaulted towards her.

Any one of those could turn Stella into a speck of dust in the same instant.

Fast. Compared to the speed of Twin-Wings's sword technique that Ikki imitated, that was more—

“HAaA!”

It was hard to handle even for Stella, who possessed excellent athletic ability and battle sense, but she understood that it would be dangerous to stay within sword range like that.

Hence, at the same time Stella received Ouma's slash attacks, she leaped back.

Using the force from receiving the opponent's sword, she escaped from coming into contact with him.

It was a method that Ikki used to take distance during the mock battle they had in the past.

However...

“ZeAAAAa!!!!”

Ouma immediately reacted to it.

He sent a flurry of vacuum blades towards Stella who escaped the contact range.

Slashes of vacuum flew with a speed that surpassed rifle bullets.

It was impossible to visually catch sight of those.

However, it was a battle between two Blazers.

Stella read the presence of magic power like that of a blazing sun wrapped around the vacuum blades, and struck them down one by one.

However...

“—Ka...fu!?”

Immediately after striking down the last vacuum blade.

Stella's abdomen tore open horizontally, blood sprayed out.

Why? Stella was confused as there wasn't any presence of magic power.

However, it was only natural.

Just then was — an effect without using magic power.

“I can't believe it. To be able to send a slash wave with just arm strength.....!”

Touka murmured with a trembled voice while watching the match in the audience stand.

That's right. What slashed open Stella's abdomen was not a Noble Art.

It was a physical wind pressure raised by Ouma swinging his *Ryuuzume*.

Of course, it was much less powerful compared to a vacuum blade.

Due to the magic power wrapped around Blazers which added strong resistance towards physical impact, the damage on Stella's abdomen was only skin-deep without reaching the internal organs, but — it was sufficient to stop her from escaping.

“Fu——!”

Ouma immediately closed in on Stella, who stopped her movement for a moment, and slashed diagonally down with his right arm.

Evade — it was already too late for such an action.

As the impact from those flying slashes was greater than what she had predicted, her body's axis was misaligned and

not in a condition for evasion.

Hence, Stella guarded Ouma's diagonal slash in her unstable posture.

However...

“Not good! The technique coming from this pose is.....!”

Ouma, who had slashed diagonally down with just his right arm, still had his left arm.

Ikki turned pale from that fact.

He knew because he had peeked at Kurogane House's training when he was young.

What would be executed from that pose was known as the sword of national defense.

It was a sword technique that Kurogane household had passed down since the samurai era, 「Kyokujitsu Isshin Ryu」
[\[4\]](#) extremity of steel.....!

“—Hono Ikazuchi.[\[5\]](#)”

Aiming at Stella's eye level as she defended against his

sword, no, accurately speaking, at the eye level of *Ryuuzume* that she defended against, Ouma's clenched left fist struck.

That steel fist struck *Ryuuzume* like a thunderclap, further adding power to the sword.

Stella, who had received the sword in an unstable posture, could not defend against that...

Stella's body was blown away with an intensity like a missile.

And she crashed into the wall below the audience stand just like that. She did not stop even after crushing—

Despite the reinforced concrete blasting open, she was thrown until outside of the venue.

Part 6

「W-Whaaat!?!」

「Lies. From the hall, blown all the way there!? It's not manga, you know!?!」

「C-Can't believe it. Would it be alright, this...」

The people who could not fit inside the dome that were listening to the broadcast made an uproar at Stella's figure blasting through the dome wall to the outside.

It was the same inside the dome.

The overly impactful scene raised an earth-shattering cheer.

「E-Extreeeeeme!! Not just a ring out, but a dome out! I have over ten years of experience as the an announcer for A-League, but I had only seen such a flashy out of field once! To think that I would be seeing it a second time in a match between students!

This is a battle between A-Rank Knights! There's no other description than out-of-norm!

—Now then, the count is beginning now!

Contender Stella, will she be able to return within the count!?!」

The announcer's voice could be heard intermittently.

The cheers from the audience reached the peak.

Stella heard it from afar while lying down face-up, looking at the sky.

(He got me.....)

The stimulation in that impact which exceeded the limit a human body could handle had paralyzed the sense of feeling in her entire body.

Since she was born, she had never received an impact as strong as that.

(What a monstrous bastard.....that guy.)

Certainly, living things possessed the ability to adapt to environments.

The history of life was the history of evolution.

Like how a creature that originally lived in the sea grew four limbs because it hoped to live on land.

Like how the process of coping with the change in living environment by walking on two feet caused the bone structure to change.

By making his own environment severe, he obtained power that could not be obtained in a normal environment.

Since life possessed the mechanism called evolution, it was not that much of a bizarre consideration.

—However, that was originally supposed to be achieved after decades or centuries of time.

Ouma had completed that in just one generation, just a few years.

Even though he could probably stop his recklessness if he wanted to, since the method of adding burden was his own ability, he cut off that common sense and temptation, ignored any half-hearted strength, only wishing for the top, the strongest. With just his will alone, he changed the design of anatomy that was drawn by god.

The word stoic already could not describe that aberrant willpower towards his goal.

(Strong.....truly.)

She could only admit.

She could feel respect for that way of living which rejected any compromises.

There was no falsehood in that.

Not even a tiny bit.

(—Aah, nevertheless...)

「Eh?」

「N-No way.....Stella-chan, is smiling?」

That's right, nevertheless, it was a strange story, but...

(As if, I don't feel like losing.....!)

Part 7

「——Five! Six!」

Ouma, who was on the ring, did not even listen to the counting that echoed in the venue.

Anyone could understand that it was meaningless.

The opponent was an A-Rank Knight like himself.

The same chosen one who was born to carry a large fate in this world.

Just that much — would not be the end for that woman.

“You said it yesterday. You will beat me up at my full strength. I have responded to that request of yours now. This is my full strength. If you want to crush it then show me. —Crimson Princess.”

As he said that, Ouma lifted his gaze upwards.

To the sky he could see as he looked up.

Over there, she was standing.

「T-There————! Contender Stella! She is looking down at

the ring from the top of the night light before we knew it! E- Even though she was hit outside so grandly, apart from some tatters on her clothes, there are no severe injuries!」

「Well, even if she smashed through the dome, she wouldn't suffer much damage from a physical impact without magic power as long as she didn't get hit by *Ryuuzume*. Especially for Stella-chan who boasts the greatest magic power capacity in the world.」

「And right now, she has returned to the ring at the count of eight!」

The audience leaked voices of exclamation in amazement towards Stella as she returned from outside like it was natural.

After the main referee made the call to resume the match, Ouma readied his *Ryuuzume* again.

However, Stella did not take a stance...

“Ouma. Before we resume the match, I want to ask one thing.”

Towards the enemy before her eyes.....she talked in the most friendly voice she had made so far.

“What?”

Ouma asked back without releasing his stance.

What she wanted to hear from him was just one thing.

“You.....for what reason are you aiming for the summit?”

That extremely tenacious willpower towards his goal.

What was the foundation that supported it? She wanted to know.

After Ouma looked down for just an instant, stayed quiet for a moment, then he answered.

“.....It’s not much of a story.

When I was a child, I was happy to have won the match held by my household for the first time.

And then I thought.

I wanted to become stronger than anyone in this world. That is.....something I would probably feel good about.

If I have to put it in words, it’s just that.”

Ouma said that such a trivial matter was not worth to talk

about purposely.

However...

“.....That’s incredible. You.”

Stella thought so in her heart.

She had her duties as a royalty.

What supported the core of the girl known as Stella was the obligation towards her citizens.

However, Ouma was not like that.

To the end, it was for his own sake.

Just for that reason alone, he had obtained that much power.

He traveled around the world, encountered despair, and yet even so, he did not compromise a single time.

That fortitude was similar to her most beloved man.....

“You are the second person that I 「respect」 from the bottom of my heart as an enemy, Ouma.

That’s why I will show you.

Crimson Princess, Stella Vermillion's true power.....!"

There was already no hatred anymore.

Even the anger about what Ouma had done before had also disappeared.

As a knight, as a warrior, she only wanted to fulfill the subjugation of that proud enemy.

Making up her mind, Stella raised her *Lævateinn*...

"Dragon Spirit.....!!!!"

—And stabbed it into her own chest.

In that instant, dazzling light, accompanied with heat wave, blew out from Stella's body, enveloping the whole venue.

Part 8

It was ten days ago.

Stella, who had decided to train herself after losing to Ouma, volunteered to take the special training from Yaksha Princess, Nene Saikyou, who was a temporary lecturer in Hagun Academy, using Kurono Shinguuji's connection.

Saikyou acknowledged her, and the two went to the training camp in Okutama that Hagun Academy owned to begin their special training.

The training with a strong opponent such as the third in the world was meaningful to Stella.

However, just however—

「There is something decisively lacking in Stella-chan's sword.」

The first day of special training. Saikyou pointed out an issue .

Something she lacked. What could it be?

Honestly speaking, she couldn't see it.

It might be conceited for Stella to say it herself, but she was confident in being a balanced Blazer.

There should not be any significant flaws.

On the other hand, she felt that Saikyou's point was a very important matter in her heart.

That's why it was even more weird.

Just like a bone stuck in the throat, Saikyou's point reverberated in Stella's head.

However, time flew by as if mocking the feeling of the impatient Stella, as she could not see the answer. Finally reaching the day before the opening of Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival—

“Now then. Tomorrow is the start of Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival, how about it? Did you realize what your sword is lacking?”

In the morning, Stella appealed to Saikyou, who had reached the field in the forest used as a training ground.

“Nene-sensei.....! Please! Please at least give me a hint of what I am lacking.....!”

However, towards that appeal, Saikyou replied with the same answer as before.

“No.”

“Why!?”

“If I taught you, it would have the reverse effect if you don’t handle it well. Especially in Stella-chan’s case, at that.”

A reverse effect in her case?

What did that mean?

It would be different if it was not her? Stella was confused.

“I totally don’t get what you’re trying to say.....”

Towards that lost child-like expression of Stella...

“Is that so? In that case, it can’t be helped.”

Saikyou sighed...

“Crimson Princess, Stella Vermillion’s Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival ends here.”

And swung her iron fan Device, *Benihiro Ageha*, in a horizontal

line.

In an instant, a shallow cut was on Stella's cheek, and blood drops spewed into air.

“—Ha?”

Stella was stunned for a moment due to the sudden enmity.

The fact that blood flowed meant that she was not holding back.

However, that was...

“W-What is it, tomorrow is the Festival, so as expected, today is...——!?”

Stella raised a voice of protest, but she did not finish what she wanted to say.

Because she saw the expression of Saikyou standing before her.

(What's with that face.....!)

What was reflected in her pupils was a bloodlust that she had never seen before during their special training.

(She's...serious.....!)

“Kuh!”

She did such a thing at such a time, when the next day the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival would start.

Stella could not understand what she was thinking doing that, but she knew just one thing.

She instinctively understood that the current situation was really bad.

Hence, Stella exploded her magic power beneath her feet, and took a large jump backwards.

She took distance from Saikyou. —However...

“I won’t let you es-cape.”

“UAAA!?”

Saikyou faced her palm upwards, and curved her index finger.

Right after that, Stella’s body was pulled towards Saikyou in the middle of jumping backwards by an invisible force.

Nene Saikyou’s ability. The attraction force from Gravity Manipulation.

She did not intend to let Stella go.

She was really serious.

Then she did not have the luxury of feeling confusion or hesitation.

Stella also changed her Device from Illusionary Form to real blade.

And she gathered a few strings of flame onto that blade...

“Katharterio•Salamandra——!”

The heated blade that turned into light flashed as it was swung down towards Saikyou who had pulled her in.

The blade of light was racing on the track of a diagonal slash at Saikyou without an err...

—However, it was at the moment when it was around thirty centimeters from Saikyou’s skin.

Suddenly, the slash’s movement curved and went off the way.

“Nah!?”

What exactly happened?

Stella's head was full of question, but she didn't have the free time to think.

That's because Saikyou, who had drawn her in, swung her iron fan.

"Kokutou•Yatagarasu."^[6]

Accompanied by a crimson iron fan that tore through the wind, was a black blade of super gravity that pushed away even light.

Stella could not evade it after her posture crumbled from missing her strike.

She couldn't evade it, but — reversing her blade to shield herself was a miraculous technique possible due to Stella's high physical ability.

However — it could do only so much.

"Kokushichou."^[7]

Against Stella, who had received her right hand's iron fan, Saikyou opened the iron fan in her left hand and swung as if fanning wind at her.

Soon, black gravitational energy formed shapes of butterflies,

fluttering their wings and flying towards Stella's flank...

“~~~~~!?!?”

Immediately after that, Stella was assaulted by a super massive impact, as if a large truck had just rammed into her, blowing away her body.

Stella's body slid past the ground, thrust into the forest behind her back, knocking down trees along the way, until a huge cliff raised from the ground.

“Ka...ha.....!”

Stella's body was about to collapse onto the ground while blood flowed out as she opened her mouth wide.

However, Stella thrust her sword into the ground to act as a support, and asked the woman in crimson kimono she could see on the other side of the collapsed trees.

“Gu-uuu.....! What...are you trying to do!? Why are you.....!”

In response, Saikyou answered.

“Nothing in particular. Stella-chan is doing special training for the sake of winning against Ouma-chan and getting a rematch with Kuro-bou, right? But.....if you can't see what your sword is lacking even now, that dream is as good as

dead. There's no meaning in participating. Rather, if you went all out against Ouma-chan who is the same A-Rank as you, you might die if you're unlucky. Cause a battle between A-Ranks is just that kind of dangerous thing.....So consider stopping you a form of love from me, as a teacher being responsible despite our short time together, alright? You can go ahead and sleep in a bed for a day or two. Everything will be over by the time you wake up."

As Saikyou told her such, she activated Jibakujin.

The gravity of the surrounding space increased, applying ten times the normal gravity on Stella's body.

She would not be able to escape easily with that, but...

"T-Thisssss! Stop jooooking!"

That would work at best against a normal Blazer.

Stella pulled out her sword from the ground while bearing the heavy pressure, and stood with her two feet...

"Dragon Faaang!!!!"

The hot flame wrapping around the sword shot out towards Saikyou with the intensity of the swing.

The flame dragons that flew out numbered ten.

They twisted their bodies between the gaps in trees as they assaulted Saikyou to devour her.

However, as they closed in on her, the flame dragons started to show abnormalities.

As if they were escaping from Saikyou, they started to wriggle away in the wrong direction.

(W-Why!? I totally cannot control them.....!)

She ordered the flame dragons a few times, but the result was the same even if she changed their tracks.

Not a single one could get close to Saikyou.

She had obstructed the homing ability with some kind of method.

—Wrong. Saikyou's ability was not something that could do that kind of job.

Then as Stella was thinking what could have caused it, she immediately understood the reason.

(I see.....! Using super gravity, she twisted the space itself around her and made it like a maze.....!)

However, there was nothing she could do even though she understood...

“Know when to quit.”

“Ga...fu.....!”

As Saikyou strengthened the pressure of Jibakujin, Stella was finally pressed down to the ground.

Her bones were making creaking sounds and her body was being buried into the ground.

Even if she wanted to stand up, she could not even lift her upper body.

(Too...strong.....)

However, that was only natural.

Her opponent was the third place in the KoK A-Rank League.

Because she was the third strongest knight within the nations of the League.

Although both were A-Rank Blazers, her opponent was too much for Stella, who was still a student.

If such an opponent was seriously trying to crush her, she

had no way of resisting.

—If she remained like that, it would really be the end.

The Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival. The important promise with Ikki.

Anything and everything would be lost.

That mortification was too much for her, causing tears to gather.

(I'm sorry.....Ikki.....I——)

However, just as Stella was about to apologize to Ikki in her heart, in that instant.

Ba-thump.

She felt her own heartbeat increasing throughout her entire body.

(Eh.....?)

Stella's weak heart, that was about to give up, slowly started beating stronger on the contrary.

It was beating crazily and calling out to Stella.

‘—What a stupid girl, trying to selfishly give up. I, will not lose to anyone’, as if it was saying that.

(Aah, speaking of which.....in the past, something similar happened as well.)

That voice calling out from her body made Stella remember her past self.

It was the time when she awakened her power as a Blazer, and was able to control it to a certain extent.

Stella was drowned in her power, which would get stronger proportional to the amount of training she did.

Where exactly could her limit be?

That bottomless talent of hers, how strong could she become with it?

She heard that her magic power seemed to be the highest in the entire world.

She felt that it was wonderful.

In that case, she would not lose to anyone.

No matter what enemy she faced...

—She would be able to protect her country, her important citizens.

(Yes. That's right.....)

Stella smiled bitterly at herself.

For the sake of becoming strong, she studied the world, watched many things, fought against various kinds of enemies—

And as she gained strength, seriously.....she forgot the most important thing.

It was the confidence of being an existence born stronger than anybody else.

She was too strict on herself, and belittled herself before she knew it.

—An opponent too much for her who was still a student?

—If such an opponent was seriously trying to crush her, she had no way of resisting?

What, what a foolish concept.

Magic power was proportional to the destiny the person was carrying.

As the possessor of the world's greatest magic power capacity, she carried an equally great destiny.

She still didn't know what kind of destiny it was, but—

At the very least, it was not something that just the world's number three could stop!

“_____”

In that case, she just had to release it.

All the power sleeping in her body that she herself did not know.

That should be in her body for sure.

Right then, just like her body, her soul roaring——!

“Ua-AA-A-AaAAAAAAAAAAAA———!!!!!!”

The moment Stella resolved herself, her body moved by itself, and stabbed *Lævateinn* into her chest.

No more hesitation, no more wavering.

It was the same as humans breathing without being conscious of it.

Her body, her cells, knew about it.

Her own power, the real way to use it——

Immediately, an explosion of heat rays came from the center of Stella's body.

A wind of light that mowed everything down in all direction was like a sickle of scorching heat.

The trees in the forest that were hit were disintegrated into ash without even having the time to burn.

While that storm of heat rays made her hair flutter.....Saikyou smiled as if she was relieved.

“Good grief, finally awakened. What a troublesome child.”

Part 9

「W-What does this mean!? Suddenly, the moment Contender Stella seemed to have made up her mind, a storm of light so blinding that we couldn't even open our eyes blew from Contender Stella and buried the whole ring! Be it the camera or the naked eyes, we are unable to determine the situation on the ring! What exactly could be happening now!?!」

「Hot! So hot!」

「Please do not touch the fence! There is a danger of getting a burn! Please keep your hands away from the fence!」

The heat wave that spread to the audience stand caused groans from the audience and voices from Mage-Knights protecting them to mix around.

Amongst that commotion, seeing the same brilliance as that time, Saikyou murmured “It's fine like this.”

(It's fine for Stella-chan to trust in her talents more.)

What she was lacking in.

Simply speaking, it was the pride in her own talent.

Stella possessed talent greater than anyone else, and yet she

did not neglect hard work.

She would honor and respect the knights possessing excellent techniques despite them having weaker magic power.

That humbleness was a virtue as a human being.

However, Saikyou thought otherwise.

If it was about Stella, such a thing might not suit her.

It would only be a virtue for those run-of-the-mill people.^[8]

It would not do for the out-of-norm genius born as the possessor of the world's greatest magic power capacity to be acting that way.

There was no need for her to follow the example of others.

What she should have was not humility, but pride.

The confidence that she was an absolute strong existence.

The reason was because she was born as a lion in the world.

In which world would a lion envy a rabbit?

Always be haughty. Be proud. Be greedy.

Be certain that not a single person in the world could be stronger than herself.

If she did that—

Her talent would respond to that haughtiness, pride, greed no matter what.....!

(.....But well, I never thought that such a monster had been lying dormant.)

Before long, the raging storm of heat rays died down, and it happened the instant their eyes readjusted after being blinded by the heat rays.

「「「.....!?」」」

Everyone in the venue drew their breaths.

The positions of Stella and Ouma did not change from before the light enveloped the ring.

However, Stella's appearance was like that of a different person.

Stella stood in the center of the heat wave-like twisted scenery.

The *Lævateinn* that pierced her chest disappeared somehow, leaving a scar shining like a heated metal.

That scar slowly flickered between bright and dim as if carving out the heartbeat. And as if synchronizing with that, the radiance from the core shone on Stella's skin and bright red hair.

That was like an entirely different thing from the brilliance of magic power Stella released until then.

It was not the brilliance of magic power gushing out, but the glow coming from within her body.

What exactly happened to her body—

In the instant everyone was having that question.

Stella slowly raised her chin up towards the sky and...

"■■■■■■■■■■——————!!!!!!"



Roared into the sky.

What was released from the lovely lips of a girl was a roar of something obviously non-human.

Like the rumbling of the earth. Like the rumbling of the sea. Or like a deafening thunder.

It was a roar that shook the atmosphere—

“Crimson Princess.....You, that voice, is.....”

“Defend yourself. You may die.”

Right after saying so, Stella crushed the distance of fifty meters between them with a speed similar to a bullet, arriving before Ouma’s bosom.

And then she clenched her fist that was shining and then threw it at Ouma as if using her whole body behind it.

“——!”

She broke through.

He could not dodge that fist.

However, to Ouma it was an attack not even on the level of a

slash by a Device. He did not need to dodge in the first place.

However — the words of warning from Stella to the defending Ouma held some certainty in it.

That certainty triggered Ouma's sense of danger.

Ouma crossed his trained arms before him and prepared for Stella's punch.

Then, Stella's swung fist hit Ouma's guard — instantly...

“Gu...ha...aa...AA.....!”

The impact that was harder and heavier than Ouma's prediction broke his guard and knocked into his ribs.

Its momentum was not killed after breaking two layers of guard, piercing through the back of Ouma through his ribs, pushing his feet along the ground.

「Contender Stella has blown Contender Ouma away despite his guard! A groan leaked out from Contender Ouma who did not change his expression regardless of any attacks or strikes from Devices! His knees are bent! It was that much of a heavy impact!」

「It's not just heavy. Look at Ouma-chan's arms.」

「Eh?」

Guided by Saikyou, the broadcasting camera zoomed in on Ouma's arms.

There was a shocking image displayed.

「T-This is.....! On Contender Ouma's arm, there is a burn mark in the shape of Contender Stella's fist as if it was branded on it.....!」

「The punch just now should have burned into his bone, literally. In other words—」

“GuuuaAA.....!”

Knees bent, Ouma pressed on the arm that received the punch as he howled in pain.

He could not be blamed.

Stella's punch did not only shatter Ouma's reinforced bones, but also burned them in one strike.

To Ouma, his bone became something like a burning red metal rod.

That intense heat was charring his flesh from the inside, burning his nerves.

「He can be accustomed to external pain, but getting burned from inside is not something you get to experience often. This will be hard on him.」

「That's true.....! B-But I don't understand! The current Contender Stella is clearly different from the Contender Stella from before! What exactly is this sudden power up about!?!」

The audience also got noisy, as if resonating with the announcer's confusion.

It would be natural if considering whether it was natural or not.

There was the raw power which made Ouma, who could not be injured even once by swords until then, bend his knees. There was the change in her appearance, there was the roar that could not be called human, there were many things they did not understand.

However—

“I see.....That is how it is.....!”

Ikki, who had been closer to Stella than anyone else for the past few months, had arrived at the answer of that mystery one step faster.

“Kurogane-kun, what is the reason for Stella-chan suddenly becoming stronger?”

Ikki nodded and replied to Touka’s question.

“.....I believe that most likely, her method of using her power was wrong from the beginning. Surely.....in the first place, Stella is not a fire user.”

“E-Eeh!? What...does that.....”

Touka’s voice contained more question to Ikki’s answer.

She could not understand the meaning behind Ikki’s words.

That was explained by Saikyou, who was at the scene when she awakened.

「Blazers are not able to use magic the moment they are born. They usually awaken abruptly on some day. Things like having the power to let out fire, or the power to control gravity. And then they learn how to use it from their own comprehension, hence there are times where misunderstandings occur.

I was like that. The very first time I was aware of my special power was the time when I made toys float in air, I actually believed that my ability was to make things float, but in

reality, it was different. It was possible to achieve that from its usage, but it was a completely different ability.

Stella-chan is the same. Of course, spewing out fire from an empty space suddenly would make anyone think that they were fire user. Well, most of them would clear their misunderstandings like me while playing or fighting when they were small.....In Stella-chan's case, she was too strong even with the misunderstanding. Due to that, she had come all the way here with that misunderstanding.」

「I-In other words, are you saying that, Contender Stella is not a fire user?」

「That's how it is. Stella-chan's original ability is not nature interference, but concept interference. And everyone should also know. The mythical monster with boiling blood circulating its body, and breathing out burning flame. The concept of the story that is passed down as a symbol of fear and violence which could not be resisted anywhere in this world.....!」

“Don't...tell me.....!”

According to Saikyou's words, Ouma, who was forced onto one knee by Stella, thought of the worst possibility as he looked up at her.

And that premonition was spot on.

“Concept interference type — Dragon.

The ability to manifest in one’s body the power of a predator that lives at the peak of the food chain in the mythological world.

That is mine, Crimson Princess’s, Stella Vermillion’s true power.”

Something like flame was just a portion of her power. It was exactly just a Breath.

Sweltering heat dwelled in her body similar to the mythical monster, allowing her to obtain the raw power of a Dragon.

Manifesting any and all kinds of violence revolved around the concept of Dragon.

That was what the real power was, and the rightful way of utilizing it.

Stella realized it in her battle against Saikyou.

In other words, the dragon that was bound to only using its 「Breath」 so far had torn away its bindings, and started to wield its full power—

“And I am not used to this power yet, so I cannot control it well. Without a doubt.....I will break you. I don't think that I will fight against you another time. That's why I will say this before the end.

Thank you, Ouma. Thanks to you, I have remembered myself.”

“.....!”

—Ouma already understood that he did not have any bit of leeway.

“Tenryuu Gusoku——!!!!”

Against Stella coming for another attack, Ouma wrapped himself in an armor of wind, intercepting the attack with his full power.

Stella was currently barehanded.

If she closed in, she would have an upper hand in maneuverability.

That's why he had to keep her at sword range.

Ouma showered Stella with countless slashes after deciding

so. However—

“Slow!”

“.....!?”

The slash attacks coming from Ouma like falling rain, that were definitely not lukewarm, were deflected by Stella’s two fists.

She caught the flank of *Ryuuzume* accurately, not leaving a single scratch on her fist.

And everytime she deflected *Ryuuzume*, Ouma’s hand felt a terrible impact.

It was an impact so forceful that if he slackened his strength a little bit, *Ryuuzume* would be blown far away from him.

Ouma held the handle with all his strength, while preventing *Ryuuzume* from being deflected away, his forehead was drenched in sweat.

(This is...a dragon’s raw power huh.....!)

The overwhelming raw power possessed by the monster living in the mythological world.

It was originally supporting the function of arm strength in

Stella's body, but that was at best unconsciously. It was like water droplets dripping out from a closed faucet.

However, Stella had realized her own power, and obtained the technique to fully open said faucet.

As such, it was natural that the power output would be different.

Currently, Stella's physical ability was several tens of times greater than before.

And then, with the destructive speed and attack power it gave her, she repelled all of Ouma's slashes, while digging closer towards him.

After deflecting about three more strikes, she would probably close in within fist range.

However...

"Fuu——!"

Ouma also did not easily allow her to accomplish that.

There, he displayed the technique of the Sword Emperor of Wind.

He abandoned the number of strikes, and swung *Ryuuzume*

widely.

He wrung his muscles to the limit, squeezed, adding a force to the point of twisting the joints on his spine, to the point of twisting his body to face away from his opponent.

Of course, Stella would further close in during that gap, he understood it.

She would probably deflect away any amount of those slashes with no weight behind anyway.

In that case, he would bet everything on the fastest single strike he had.

Preparing his sword from the limit of his swing was for that sake.

What he was about to release was the godspeed sword passed down in Kyokujitsu Isshin Ryu.

Naturally, every muscle in his entire body was used, it even used the rebound of the joints and bones in his body by returning his posture from its twisted position to the original one to accelerate, it was exactly a sword released with his entire body and spirit.

There was no preparation or counter after releasing that one

strike.

It was just speed alone was principle. Cut alone was justice.

That was truly—

“Kyokujitsu Isshin Ryuu•Jin no Kyoku. —Amaterasu!”^[9]

“.....!”

The white blade swung from the position after his body twisted to the limit fell onto Stella without a sound.

Despite just one strike, different from Ikki’s Blade Steal, Ouma’s Amaterasu, which had truly reached Twin-Wings’s territory, exceeded the limit of reaction even for Stella with dragon’s power dwelling inside her, *Ryuuzume* cut Stella’s body diagonally.

Blood sprayed into the air.

He felt the feedback of *Ryuuzume* cutting flesh and bones squarely.

It did not reach the organs, but it was probably a sufficient strike to dull her movements.

It was supposed to be so—

“There!”

“Gu...u!”

Let alone retreating, Stella stepped forward despite receiving Amaterasu, her long leg lashed out like a whip and kicked Ouma’s right shin.

Stella’s low kick made a sound like something popped, broke through Tenryuu Gusoku and crushed Ouma’s shin bone with just one strike.

Ouma wobbled in pain while being confused at what happened.

Certainly, although Amaterasu did not cause a fatal wound, it should have dealt sufficient damage to rob Stella of her mobility.

Ouma immediately noticed the answer.

(This is.....!)

That large cut wound on Stella.

There was not a single drop of blood from there.

No, on the contrary, the wound was being stitched up at an

unbelievable speed in front of his eyes.

That was the strength of vitality possessed by the creature known as dragon.

—Since ancient times, it was common sense to decapitate a dragon to subjugate it.

To a creature such as dragon, a wound that was not fatal could not be considered a wound.

Stella had just recreated the vitality of a dragon that could be said to be immortal with a human body through inheritance.

—An indecisive wound could not be considered a wound anymore.

“Tch!”

The versatility of that ability was even wider than his imagination.

Ouma judged that he had to observe the situation and let go of his left hand from *Ryuuzume* and gathered the air on his palm.

What he created was a explosive bullet of wind made from air.

He threw it and intended to take distance by blowing Stella's body away.

That was the most appropriate action Ouma judged in that instant. —However...

“Out of the way!”

Even that most appropriate action was useless against the ferocious dragon.

The released explosive bullet of wind was scattered by Stella's back hand punch.

Ouma's expression froze at that outcome.

(Like steel crushing rock, the hardness of her magic power crushed my magic.....!)

And with that move, Stella had caught Ouma within fist range.

Ouma immediately pulled back his empty-handed left arm to guard...

“Ugh——!”

That punch crushed the bone of the guarding arm like a matter of course, and the impact pierced into his organs.

Ouma's body wobbled back greatly and his knees bent.

He could not stop it. He could not stop Stella's fierce attack.

Not his trained muscles, not his sharpened speed, not technique, not magic—

Everything that he had accumulated was meaningless.

He would be trampled on. By pure violence that could knock down everything.

And that helplessness caused Ouma to get a flashback on the memory of his first loss and frustration.

He, who was covered in blood miserably, and that pair of pupils glaring at him while sitting on a chair like it was a throne.

Nothing went through no matter what he did.

Despite him challenged again and again, he could even not touch the seated Tyrant, he could not even protect his own body, and was just single-sidedly beaten up.

His body suffered burning pain. His heart felt helplessness.

As he linked everything to the fear that shook him at that

time in the past, his whole body started to tremble.

“Ku...O...OoOoOoo—!”

Even so, Ouma struggled to raise his trauma-carved body and counter attacked.

He aimed to stab at Stella’s heart as she chased after him for further attacks after he collapsed backward.

However, with his crushed right leg and battered body he could not aim accurately as he wanted...

The stab was — blocked.

Stella purposely pushed out her left hand at the incoming *Ryuuzume*, letting it pierce through her palm as she advanced, and grabbed hold of the sword guard of *Ryuuzume* after it pierced through to the base.

“I caught you, Ouma.”

(Shi——)

It was too late by the time he thought so.

Stella punched her superheated right fist into Ouma’s upper body that was full of openings.

“HAAaAaa————!!!!”

She also did not end it with one strike.

She had the intention of determining the outcome and rained down consecutive punches.

With *Ryuuzume* caught, Ouma could not even escape backwards with the impact from the hits.

If he were to let go of *Ryuuzume* once, Stella would probably not even give him the time to reconstruct his Device.

He must not let go. If he were to let go, he would lose. Hence, he could not escape.

He could not escape, he could not even defend, he could only let the consecutive punches that were like cannon shots shower on him.

And that storm-like punches that fell onto him burnt his skin, grilled his flesh, crushed his bones—

“~~~~~Ka...ha!!!!”

The instant Ouma’s chin finally lowered.

An uppercut that came from the ground level thrust upwards at his chin, hitting the four hundred kilo body of

Ouma into the air.

His body flew through the air in a big parabola, and fell onto the stone disk with his back without any protection.

In that match, no, in that Festival, Sword Emperor of Wind sank onto the ground for the first time.

Part 10

「Contender Ouma...down! He is lying down in a ‘大’ position and looking at the sky without moving! No he can’t move!」

「H-How intense.....」

「This...already determined the match, right?」

「This is.....the Blazer possessing the world’s strongest magic power huh.....!」

A big reversal from the eventful out of the ring.

The strength of Stella, who had displayed her true power, caused a big commotion in the venue.

However, even that commotion did not reach Ouma who had fallen on the ring.

It was no wonder. His right leg fractured from the shin, left wrist dislocated, his rib cage did not have a single bone uninjured. The jawbone that received an uppercut was smashed from the root of his teeth, that crack reached even his skull. And the heat from those shattered bones were burning his flesh from inside currently.

The injuries were so severe that it wouldn’t be strange if he

had lost his consciousness.

There was no way he could hear the surrounding voices.

Ouma simply looked at the sky with his clouded pupils, and once again recalled within his spaced-out consciousness.

Similar to the day of frustration five years ago.

How vast the world was.

How tiny he was.

—Certainly, Ouma had an out-of-norm talent like that of gold.

However.....his talent was like golden sand.

There were people who possessed similar golden talent but that of a gold ingot.

There was a world where only such kind of chosen existences could stand in.

The summit was that kind of place.

.....Shouldn't it be about the time for him to recognize his lack of ability?

If he recognized his lack of ability, he would probably receive

the honor worthy of him.

Reality had always been persuading him so.

(But...even so.....)

“—.....U...oo.”

「C-Contender Ouma flipped his body around and is trying to raise his body with his arms! He is trying to stand up! Contender Stella is also showing a shocked expression!」

(.....I have ambition to continue even if my chest is burned.)

No matter how many times he realized the vastness of the world...

No matter how many times his accumulated confidence and pride were shattered...

His unwithering desire to continue remained unchanged.

—He would wish for any and everything.

It was fine if he did not have a comfortable life.

It was fine to just have one thing.

—He wanted to be number one.

To stand at the summit of the world he loved.

It was a wish he held since the day he obtained his first victory.

Compared to Stella's wish of protecting her country, it would only be called a selfish and childish wish.

By being able to throw a ball a little faster than others, one would want to become a baseball player.

By being able to draw a little better than others, one would want to become a manga artist.

It could only be seen as a typical future wish of a child.

However, even after losing his confidence and pride, Ouma still moved with the desire to push forward.

It was just his desire.

In that case, no matter how childish it was, how selfish it was—

(That is...for a person such as me...a wish that is worth betting a lifetime on!)

That's why — just that alone, he would not concede!

“OOOooOooOooooAaAAAAA————!!!!”

「H-He stood up! Contender Ouma, while letting out a roar as if spitting out his blood, he raised his battered body and stood up! U-Unbelievable! Even though his arms and legs were smashed.....!」

「He used atmospheric pressure as a cast to maintain his bone structure forcefully.....Ouma-chan has not given up yet!」

Before he knew it, the trembling of his body had stopped.

What was boiling in his marrows was not fear, but boundless competitiveness.

His flesh was, blood was, bone was, soul was—

Everything that made up the shape of a man known as Ouma Kurogane stirred up for one thing.

He would surpass her, that was.

Facing the despair that rose up in the past, he did not feel a tiny bit of resignation.

Ever since he was defeated by the Tyrant, he had gone through that one thousand five hundred days as he thought of challenging that territory once again, it was reckless but definitely not useless.



It was because of those days that he could stand up again.

It was because of those days that he could fight again.

Then he just had to move on. Just as his heart desired so.

“It’s showdown. —Crimson Princess.”

Ouma injected all his remaining magic power into *Ryuuzume*, wrapping it in a tornado.

The tornado increased in density as it swallowed the surrounding air, becoming a sword of storm from thousands of wind blades in due time.

The claw of the heavenly dragon that would tear everything upon contact.

It was the trump card of the Sword Emperor of Wind, Ouma Kurogane, which had defeated Stella before.

Ouma raised it towards the sky, and pleaded at Stella with his eyes.

—Draw your blade.

It was the figure that would take on the full power of his

enemy despite knowing the difference in strength.

To the world that he loved, he would not compromise, not deceive himself, such was his spirit.

Seeing that, Stella comprehended as she remembered the side profile of Ikki as he talked about Ouma.

「Well, just that from my impression as far as I know, he is a seriously stoic person.」

—When she was talking with Ikki about Ouma, he praised him as such.

She could understand a bit of that feeling currently.

He definitely.....respected his brother.

Only moving for his own sake.

He was a knight who held onto his dream from when he was young, and continued to face it more sincerely than anyone.

In that case—

“I will take you on. —Sword Emperor of Wind.”

Stella also responded with the magic boasting the greatest

attack power amongst her Noble Arts.

What took shape in her palm that was raised towards the sky was a sword of light made from binding the heat that could only be seen as an unwavering flame.

Magic power was the power to open up destiny.

In other words — willpower.

Binding her willpower, holding her willpower, Stella faced off against the enemy before her eyes.

There was no more conversation between their intersecting gazes.

No, there was no need to.

As things had come to that far, they understood that they only had to cross swords.

And then, the flame and wind knights released their killing techniques...

“Kusanagiiii!!!!”

“Katharterio•Salamandraaaa!!!!”

Both of them swung down with all of their strength.

The sword of storm and sword of heat crossed.

That was similar to the fight before, a storm of heat bursted out in the moment of contact...

However — it was not evenly matched currently.

Because Sword Emperor of Wind was swallowed into it just like that.

Part 11

The Katharterio·Salamandra that Stella had released did not stop at subjugating Sword Emperor of Wind, it had also slashed apart the Bay Dome, as well as the Osaka Bay beyond.

The audience stand and the huge screen in the dome were burned. A deep trench was carved on the seabed.

Along with the extraordinary destruction and dramatic closure, the announcer raised an excited voice.

「A-Amazing! Contender Stella, she has cut Sword Emperor along with the sea!」

「S-SSS-SCARYyyYYY!」

「If World Clock had not stopped the time for evacuation, I would've been cut along with that.....What an outrageous princess.」

The audience raised a commotion at the carved out scar of destruction.

And Ouma, who was completely bathed in that destructive power, would definitely not be unharmed.

The main referee judged that Ouma was unable to continue the fight, and announced the end of the match.

At the same time, he announced Stella's victory.

「Just now, the main referee has announced Contender Stella's victory! A battle worthy of attention. The one who conquered this duel between both A-Rank monsters is Contender Crimson Princess, Stella Vermillion!

Well, we speculated that both of them would be more evenly matched in this first match of the semi-final, but seeing the result, it is still the record holder of the world's greatest magic power capacity after all! She suppressed Sword Emperor of Wind with overwhelming power from a different dimension! As expected, the wall of magic power capacity at birth is still tall!」

However, to those words of the announcer...

「That is wrong.」

Saikyou objected next to him.

「Wrong...meaning...there are other reasons for the victory?」

「Of course. Certainly, the strength of magic power is an important talent proportional to the greatness of destiny the

Blazer carries in this world. But using that great power wrongly will also cause great backlash to the user. To use it well, it is necessary to put in an effort more than usual and have the strength of heart to continue that.....If not, in unfortunate cases it is possible to be devoured by that talent. In fact, Stella-chan had almost died many times due to her power when she was a child.」

「I-Is that so!?!」

「This is a famous rumor in Mage-Knight world. But Stella-chan never gave up no matter how many times she came close to death. It is because she had continued training without any compromise, she managed to let her own blood boil to imitate the dragon. Just a single mistake could cause her magic power control to be cut off from the power that can burn herself. Basically, I believe that the reason Stella-chan won this fight is because of her strong willpower.」

Certainly, Stella had used her power wrongly.

However, that was not a path of no return, but a necessary process.

She had properly practised to control her real power correctly.

And because Stella did not stop during that process, without compromise, overcoming it, she was able to use the power of

a Dragon.

That's why saying that the talent she had possessed since birth was the reason for her victory was rude to her.

「Well, in any case, those are trifling matters, the most important reason was thanks to me, the one who made Stella-chan awaken to her hidden potential! Ah, sorry for being too great of a coach! Ahaha!」

While ignoring Saikyou's giggles, on the ring, Stella released the power of dragon dwelling in her body.

The boiling blood lost its heat, the glowing heat on her whole body disappeared.

And after returning completely back to a neutral state, Stella breathed out a sigh as if she was relieved, and murmured in a small voice that nobody could hear.

(I won.....)

She had broken Ouma's Kusanagi that had defeated her before.

That was the result of growth she could see.

She definitely became stronger. Compared to herself from a few weeks ago, far stronger.

If it was the current her, she could definitely reach him.

A few months ago, the opponent whom she could not even touch.

Ikki Kurogane's back that she had been chasing after ever since that day.

—However, as Stella reminiscenced her own growth, her expression was not that of a smile.

The reason was—

(To think that he has managed to come this far, I never expected it.)

Despite receiving a merciless sure-kill strike that even blew all the way to the sea, Ouma Kurogane stood upright without falling on the ring.

The slash wound of heat carved from his shoulder to his flank, his consciousness already gone, but without bending his knees, his gaze, overflowing with fighting spirit, turned towards Stella.

In those eyes, a trace of 「I will definitely get there」 such a strong will remained.

His sword was broken, but his soul was not.

Before such an enemy that could catch up to her any moment, there was no way she could smile.

Eventually, the medical team rushed up the ring with stretchers.

They were probably carrying Ouma to the Medical Room.

That's why Stella cut off from Ouma's gaze in that instant, and turned away from the ring.

Not bending his knees until the last moment before her was Ouma's obstinacy.

She could not break that obstinacy.

In that case, she did not have the right to watch his figure lying on the stretcher.

There was only one thing she should keep in her memory.

The figure of a man that continued to challenge her by exhausting all his power, for that childish.....but a dream purer than anyone else's.

She thought so.

—Like that, defeating the fateful opponent, Sword Emperor of Wind...

Crimson Princess, Stella Vermillion moved forward to the finals first.

Chapter 13 - The Semi-Final Shrouded in Dark Clouds

破軍学園壁新聞

キャラクターピックアップス

文責・日下部加々美

SHIZUYA KIRIHARA

桐原静矢

■PROFILE

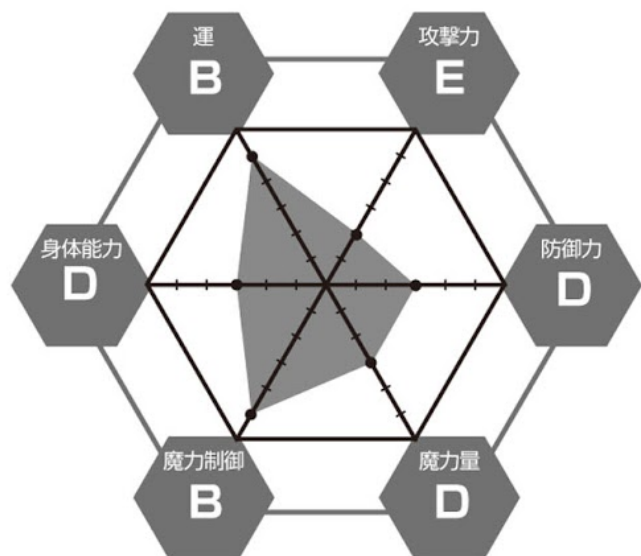
所属：破軍学園二年三組

伐刀者ランク：C

伐刀絶技：^{エリアインビジブル}狩人の森

二つ名：狩人

人物概要：昨年度破軍学園
七星剣武祭代表生



かがみんチェック！

スタイルは絶対的なステルス性能を持つ《狩人の森》に隠れつつ、長距離から敵を不可視の矢で射貫くこと。相手が広範囲攻撃を持っていない限り、ワンサイドゲームを展開できる、かなり強力な能力の持ち主だよ。

ちょっと性格に難のある先輩だけど、破軍学園代表選抜戦初戦で《無冠の剣王》をあと一步のところまで追い詰

めた力は間違い無く本物。破軍学園屈指の実力者の一人だね。

HAGUN ACADEMY WALL NEWSPAPER

Character Topics ____ Writer • Kagami Kusakabe

Shizuya Kirihara

■ PROFILE

Affiliation: Hagun Academy, Year Two Class Three

Blazer Rank: C

Noble Art: Area Invisible

Nickname: Hunter

Personal Summary: Last year's Hagun Academy Sword-Art Festival representative

Attribute chart (starting at far left, going clockwise)

Physical Ability: D

Luck: B

Offensive Power: E

Defensive Power: D

Magic Capacity: D

Magic Control: B

Kagamin Check!

His fighting style uses his ability of absolute stealth, Area Invisible, and pierces his opponent with invisible arrows from long range. As long as his opponent doesn't have an attack that hits a wide area, he can make the match one-sided, which makes him the owner of a rather strong ability.

This upperclassman has a somewhat difficult personality, but he did drive the Crownless Sword King to within a step of defeat during the first round of the Hagun Academy Festival representative selection battles, so his power is definitely the real thing. He's one of Hagun Academy's strongest, okay?

Part 1

Under the rain of applause from the audience, Stella left the ring.

As Kanata Toutokubara watched from the audience stand, she let out a sigh that had been held in and exclaimed.

“That was an incredible fight.....”

At her side, Touka Toudou nodded and replied.

“Yes. I definitely knew that she had an abnormal level of talent, but I never thought that the Sword Emperor of Wind would not be a match for her after such a short amount of time.”

Touka pondered. She herself probably could not be compared to her at all.

In just one short week.....It was an unbelievable rate of growth.

“Ouma-san has touched the dragon’s inverted scale and awakened it.”

Had Ouma not done that, the winner of that match would

probably be him.

Ikki's words interrupted Kanata's muttering from the side.

"He did it on purpose though."

"Is that so?"

Ikki nodded.

"Be it himself or his opponent, he is a man that does not compromise. Nii-san has toured the world and knows the height of the summit, so it would probably be meaningless to him if Stella did not exert her full strength. I think that's why he provoked her.....He did not look at the glory of certain victory in the match before his eyes, but he did it for the sake of continuing his goal of becoming the strongest."

"Certainly.....seems like what Ouma-san would do."

"That's right. Blatantly assaulting the school, ambushing me so that I would drop out from the Festival, well, not choosing his methods of achieving his dream. As the brother, I also want to complain to him. —That stoic attitude of his is what I've respected since the past."

He could still remember it if he closed his eyes.

In the dojo basked in the dusk sunlight, despite the instructor

and the children of the branch families all gone, the back of Ouma who continued to swing his sword alone.

He learned many things from that back profile.

He stole many techniques from that back profile.

In that sense, Ouma Kurogane could be said to be Ikki Kurogane's teacher.

And then — that Ouma was subdued by Stella with an overwhelming difference in strength without any difficulty.

“.....Honestly speaking, I never imagined that she would become this strong. The naivety that was in Stella during our mock battle before has disappeared. The difference in power is already beyond a range that I can catch up to, my advantage in speed is also almost gone.....How should I face her, my head hurts.”

“Your words and expression are mismatched. You look really happy.”

“.....Yeah. Stella is not the only one that became stronger since than that time.”

Stella certainly had a shocking growth, but he also did not just laze around until now.

Even as he was watching Ouma's match, he was thinking about the way to fight against Stella.

And he had come up with a few tactics.

—Chance of victory was there. It was definitely there.

If he clashed head on with his all like Ouma, there would be no chance of victory of course.

However, that was just the usual.

He did not consider a tiny bit about competing in strength against Stella.

Strength was not the only way to win a fight.

A complete victory without any room for argument was not the only form of victory.

(That's what Ouma Nii-san would probably call trickery.)

That was only the thought of Ouma from his way of life.

A person without talent like Ikki lived in the way of a person without talent.....there was a motive to go through with it.

Even if his brother could not comprehend him, he would walk

on his own path that he believed in.

“Work hard and win. I’m cheering for you!”

“Toudou-san will be cheering for me, huh?”

“Since you are someone I lost to. If you don’t properly take responsibility for it...”

So that’s it, Ikki was definitely convinced. However...

“Thank you very much. But.....well, that’s something for tomorrow.”

At that moment...

「For the sake of cleaning the ring and repairing the venue, we will commence a thirty-minute break from now.

The contenders for the second match of the semi-finals, please move to the waiting room during the break.」

Such an announcement came from the venue.

That’s right. Before fighting against Stella, there was a wall he had to climb.

There was a guy he had to defeat.

“.....I have to clean up this first.”

Saying so, Ikki left the fence and climbed up the stairs along the audience stand.

Towards the waiting room.

Watching the back of that Ikki...

“_____”

Touka, who was left behind, felt a small doubt.

“He seems to be full of motivation. It’s natural since his sister was humiliated like that.”

“Is it just...that?”

“Kana-chan?”

“He doesn’t seem to be thinking of simply avenging Shizuku-san. It’s somehow a greater.....”

If it was to be expressed in words.....it felt like
「determination」.

And it was unusually heavy—

That’s right. Just like the last day of the selection battle.

Like how he dragged his body that was on the verge of death to appear before her.

That great determination as if betting his whole existence.

Part 2

On his way to the waiting room, Ikki decided to take a detour.

The place the authorized personnel pathway led to was the Medical Room.

He went to see Shizuku and Arisuin who were still resting.

He had a really good timing.

At the same time as Ikki arrived at the corridor of the Medical Room, Shizuku and Arisuin walked out of the Medical Room's door.

“Shizuku.....!”

“O-Onii-sama!?”

They probably never thought that they would run into each other.

The two of them were also surprised when they saw Ikki who was running towards them.

“My oh my, what a timing. I wonder if you have come to see us before the match.”

“Yes. I see that you two also woke up.”

“Yeah, just now.”

“Are you already well enough to move around? You two were done in quite horribly though.”

“Thank you for worrying. But my body is fine thanks to being treated early. Hey, Shizuku — eh, what are you doing?”

“Sh-Shizuku.....?”

Shizuku had hidden her head with her clothes. Then peeked out from the collar with her eyes in apology...

“.....I am too ashamed to face Onii-sama.....”



She murmured as she avoided Ikki's gaze.

"Not only had I failed to stop that guy, I could not do anything as I was humiliated.....I am so weak, it's embarrassing."

Shizuku's voice shook in frustration as she apologized for her powerlessness.

However, towards her, Ikki...

"You don't have to apologize for that."

Saying so, he gently hugged Shizuku.

"Eh, o...onii...sama?"

"Thank you. Not just for me, you fought for the pride of all the knights that participated in this Festival.....Shizuku is my prided little sister."

"Onii...sama.....**sob**."

Her regrets probably resurfaced as Shizuku looked up in Ikki's arms.

Ikki wiped away Shizuku's warm tears caringly, and spoke.

"Let me carry out Shizuku's will. I won't let him do as he

pleases anymore in this Festival.”

“Do you have a plan? Amane’s ability is beyond strong, you know?”

However, Ikki shook his head to Arisuin’s question.

“.....No. There’s no plan. But, yesterday, I finally understood. Amane-kun’s true identity.”

Currently, he could understand.

The meaning of that disgusting feeling Amane always possessed since their first meeting.

That pair of pupils which harboured negative chaos, annoyingly staring at him from the bottom of the well of his memories.

As well as who that belonged to.

And then, because Ikki understood that, he declared to the two of them.

“Don’t worry. I will not lose to him. Just against him alone — I will never lose.”

Part 3

It was the thirty minute break time arranged between the first and the second match.

In that short amount of time, the sky greatly changed.

「It suddenly became cloudy. Looks like it's going to rain.」

The clear blue sky a moment ago was hidden by the low layer of clouds and seemed like it was about to collapse at any moment, a cloudy sky.

And black crows flew down from the cloudy sky, staring at the empty ring without making a sound.

Everyone in that place felt some sort of ominous premonition.

What exactly would happen?

While feeling the sinister atmosphere deep in their hearts, people waited for the time to begin.

「The next match is between Another One and Bad Luck huh.....」

「Who do you think will win?」

「I hope that Ikki-kun will win.....I don't really like that Shinomiya guy.」

「More like that's definitely against the rules. "The ability to grant anything I wish for" was it? It's a hot topic the students from Kyomon leaked on the net, winning without fighting all the way until now, it's not possible.」

「But there's no evidence.....Of Contender Shinomiya using that ability.」

「Will Ikki-kun arrive safely.....」

Before long, the announcement suppressed the discussions amongst the audience.

「Informing everyone present.

It is time, we are about to commence the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival semi-finals second match.」

And after that announcement, the broadcast changed to the announcer Iida.

「It's been thirty minutes, everyone! Continuing to the semi-finals second match, the announcer will be me, Iida, and the commentator will be Saikyou-sensei. It was a fine sunny

weather until just now, and it became such a humid sky as if the sunny weather was a lie, but please do not worry as the bay dome has a retractable glass roof! No matter what kind of weather it is, as long as the contenders are doing their best, let us cheer for them with spirit!」

With Iida's lead, the audience raised their cheers and applauded.

The heavy atmosphere in the dome was blown away by the passion.

—Such empty cheers would still be considered cheering.^[10]

Clapping to the point of feeling pain in their hands, the anxiety and humidity were dispersed, and the venue started to become hyper. Aiming for that moment...

「Now then! Let's welcome the contenders of this match who are vying for the remaining spot to reach the finals! Contenders — enter!」

Iida gave the cue.

In response to that, appearing first was the figure of a black-haired youth from the blue gate.

「Entering from the blue gate, despite possessing weak magic

power of F-Rank value, he has made up for it with his body techniques to reach all the way here, this Festival's attention grabber! Contender Ikki Kurogane!

In the first round, he faced off against Contender Seven Star Sword King, Yuudai Moroboshi, and defeated him...

In the second round, against the runner-up of the previous Festival, Contender Byakuya Jougasaki, it was literally an instant kill!

In the third round that became a consecutive battle, he cut apart Twin-Wings, despite it being a counterfeit, and finally entered the country's best four! He has made his way into the stage of the semi-finals!

If he wins this battle, he will be in the finals!

Will he be able to grab the ticket to the battle in the finals with his superb swordsmanship!？」

「Ah! He showed up! Ikki-kun properly showed up! He seems to be well!」

「Fuu. I'm really glad. I was thinking of complaining to the Organizing Committee if even Another One lost without a fight.」

「Worst One! Don't lose to that cheating guy!」

The audience that regained their enthusiasm from Iida's motivation welcomed Ikki with a round of loud applause.

Amidst that—

“Shizuku! Alice!”

Stella, who had just finished her match, met up with Shizuku and Arisuin in the audience stand.

“Oh my, Stella-chan. You worked hard. It was an incredible match.”

“You watched it?”

“Shizuku and me watched from halfway.”

“I see. Thank you.”

As Stella replied to Arisuin, she turned her gaze to Shizuku.

And...

“Shizuku.....erm, are you feeling better?”

Asked in a caring tone.

Stella understood what kind of humiliation she had suffered the most.

That's why she noticed it.

Towards Stella's worry — Shizuku replied with a mischievous smile.

"Yeah. Onii-sama just hugged me gently a moment ago so Shizuku is fully charged."

"Nah! What were you doing while someone else was fighting!?"

"Are you jealous? Then I don't mind if you just sniff at the lingering scent, you know?"

"N-No thanks!"

Pushing away Shizuku's hand that was holding her freshly untied tie, Stella sighed in resignation.

"Seriously.....if you can say such nasty things, then you are already fine."

Shizuku also tied back her tie and showed her usual cold expression...

"That's how it is.....Compared to me, I think that the person

behind you is closer to dying.”

Saying so, she directed her gaze to Kurono who had come together with Stella.

A thick layer of fatigue could be seen from Kurono’s face at one glance.

“Why does Director-sensei look so exhausted?”

Kurono answered Arisuin’s question in a tired voice.

“There’s no why or how. Because this idiot over here was inconsiderate of my hardships with her firepower and anyhow destroyed the venue.....”

“Ahh.....Director-sensei is also doing that repair work.”

“Because it’s done by my student.....”

“It can’t be helped. I still haven’t gotten used to controlling my strength in my trance state. It’s the fault of the venue for being too small in the first place.”

“There’s no venue that can encompass a slash that went more than one kilometer into the sea. Hold back a little next time.”

“I will work hard on concentrating but I don’t want to hold

back. I will regret if I lose because of that. Also, Nene-sensei also said that there's no batter who is scared of swinging the bat with full strength just because the homerun ball may hit the audience. Protecting the venue and audience is the job of Mage-Knights, so students should not care and just go for it."

"She's saying unnecessary things....."

"But I also heard that Director-sensei was quite mischievous during her student period. Such as the holes caused by sensei destroying the space, there are also prohibited areas people can't enter, as those holes have yet to close. And various other stories."

"Ugu....."

Arisuin stabbed Kurono on the side, and she let out a groan.

Certainly, compared to the wounds she gave to the world that could not be recovered from, Stella's damage was still cute since it could be repaired over time, making her unable to retort back.

In the end, Kurono could only step down while repeating "I understand, I understand".

"Rampage as much as you like. I will take care of the loose ends. It's true that this is my job."

“Thank you, Director♪”

At the same time Stella was thanking Kurono, the petite blonde boy entered from the gate opposite to Ikki's.

「And entering from the red gate is Akatsuki Academy First Year. Contender Bad Luck, Amane Shinomiya!

In the first round, his opponent was Contender White-Robed Knight, Kiriko pharmacist, but she forfeited due to her patients' condition suddenly worsening.

In the second round, his opponent was hospitalized due to poor health and he won without fighting.

Continuing to the third round, Contender Lorelai, Shizuku Kurogane believed that the previous two matches' results were suspicious and assaulted Contender Amane, who was standing by in the waiting room, causing her to be disqualified for violating the rules, allowing him to win without a single fight all the way to the semi-finals!

In addition, those quick on the news should also know about the existing topic in the net regarding Contender Amane winning continuously without fighting since he was in Kyomon Academy!

However, please don't be mistaken. There is no evidence to show that Contender Amane used his causality interference ability illegally. All of these are just the results of overlapping coincidences. Wow, there are times when so many coincidences can overlap. As expected of the owner of such fortune to be given the nickname Bad Luck.」

「Ah it's true. Just a coincidence, a coincidence (monotone)」

“Hey, Saikyou-sensei.....!”

Saikyou's words caused Iida to stop the mic in a hurry and warned her.

“At least, we don't have any evidence, so please don't use (monotone)!”

“Eh? Then is it fine to say my real thoughts?”

“It isn't fine! Please just keep quiet as much as possible then!”

「Eh...eh, ahem. Contender Amane, who has continuously won without fighting, is standing on the ring in this Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival for the first time now! It's the first match on the official field. What kind of power will he show us? It seems to be an interesting match!」

Glossing over the unnatural pause with coughs, Iida resumed the broadcast.

However, the audience did not care about the unnatural pause, and instead watched the spoken knight who was showing himself on the field for the first time with interest.

「After this and that, it's the first time he showed up properly. He looks somewhat like a girl.」

「He looks quite cute.....」

「Does he? Behaving so flippantly, I don't know what he's thinking, he somehow feels eerie.」

“Amane that guy, he doesn't seem popular.”

“Well, he came here without a single fight, it's to be expected. There's no way that kind of weird fight record can be popular.”

“Shinomiya is also a person the Committee side is vigilant against and is under strong surveillance, but.....as long as he has the ability of 「Changing the causality to his own advantage」, it's better to think that it would be impossible to grab hold of any evidence which could be disadvantageous to him.....although it's frustrating.”

Suspicion does not justify punishment.

As long as that remained as the country's main principle, there was no method to seize Amane in the current situation.

Any and all causality was bent in favor of Amane.

Shizuku, who had experienced the strength of that power first hand, watched her brother standing on the ring, and thought.

What exactly would he do?

He did seem to be quite confident, but.....how exactly would he overcome Amane's Nameless Glory?

However—.....Shizuku would soon realize how foolish it was to think about the way to overcome it.

As for the reason why...

「Now then, as both contenders are at the starting line, the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival semi-finals second match will now beg—」

“Ahh, please hold on a moment!”

Amane suddenly spoke loudly on the ring...

“I — am thinking of forfeiting this match.”

To the referee with such words.

Part 4

「「Ha...HAAaa!?!?!?」」」

It was so sudden that the venue was in commotion due to the unexpected declaration from Amane.

Shizuku reacted the same way.

“W-What is that guy saying.....!?”

“.....What..is he playing at.....”

Be it Stella, Shizuku, or anyone else, none of them could understand what Amane was thinking.

Especially Arisuin and Shizuku, who knew about the strong hatred Amane had towards Ikki, they were even more confused.

Even though they were certain that he would do something to Ikki in that match, what exactly was happening?

「C-Contender Amane! Er..rm, are you forfeiting? Does this mean that you are giving up this semi-final!?!」

The announcer was also confused after the sudden request, and asked again to make sure he didn't hear wrongly.

“Yes. That’s how it is.”

「Why exactly.....!？」

“I have to say it, huh?”

For an instant, Amane gave a small bitter smile, and pointed out.

“You see. Everyone is thinking the same thing as Shizuku-san, that I am cheating.”

「Th-That’s.....」

Amane’s words made everyone present silent.

Just like he said, everyone held strong distrust towards Amane.

Amane took that silence as confirmation...

“Controlling causality is my ability, so being suspected cannot be helped. Of course, I never did such a thing, but I know it’s impossible not to be suspected. And if that guy won, nobody will be convinced. That’s why I want to withdraw from this Festival. Well, basically, I know how to read the mood.”

That was the reason he told for withdrawing from the semi-finals.

And after that, he faced Ikki, who was looking at him quietly from the starting line, and apologized with a sorry looking face—

“.....That’s how it is. Sorry, Ikki-kun. I believe that the serious Ikki-kun does not wish to enter the finals in this way, but please forgive me.....Honestly speaking, I’m at the limit due to everyone’s painful gazes. This atmosphere feels like a bed of needles. Ah, but, although I have given up as a contender, I will cheer you on until the end! Because I am a big fan of Ikki-kun!

I intend to cheer for you with my all so that Ikki-kun will be victorious! Tomorrow’s final battle as well!”

At that moment...

“““~~~~~!!!!”””

Shizuku understood the real intention of Amane, and was astonished.

—Oh no.

「Eh.....then.」

「If that guy with such a cheat ability cheers for him, wouldn't Worst One just win?」

Such, was what the audience considered. That was the real intention of Amane.

Amane did not intend to do anything to Ikki in the semi-finals.

He was.....intending to interfere the promised battle between Ikki and Stella in the finals the next day.

That was.....an impurity that was not allowed.

He intended to trample on Ikki's most important promise, something he had betted everything on, and bring it to an end.

It would hurt him more than just defeat.

“T-That bastard.....! How far is he going to fool around.....!”

Amane's action that was full of malice made Stella grind her molar teeth and she clenched her fist so tightly to the point that the blood vessels congested.

The unusual glitters at the end of her hair indicated her temper that could burst at any time.

On the other hand, Amane on the ring did not seem to notice Stella...

“No no! Everyone misunderstood! It’s only in the range without using my ability!”

He waved his hands and explained it to the audience.

However.....there was not a trace of apology in that expression.

What was there was...joy.

That’s only natural.

The reason being.....Half of Amane’s conspiracy had been achieved at that moment.

Forfeit was an individual right of the contender.

There was nobody who could prevent it.

Ikki’s blade would never reach Amane again, and he lost the method to stop Amane’s conspiracy.

Hence Amane turned to Ikki with an ecstasy-filled joyful face...

“Don’t worry, Ikki-kun! I know how important the battle between Ikki-kun and Stella-san is, so I will not interfere! Of course, I also never once did anything like pushing Ikki-kun’s back for the matches until now!”

He spoke proudly as if his conspiracy was achieved.

When he heard those words...

“.....I thought so.”

Ikki, who had not spoken a word towards Amane until then, opened his mouth.

“You wishing for my victory is impossible. That isn’t something you can even joke about. Your hatred towards me is not so lukewarm after all. If there is anything you wish for me, then it would be my agony and suffering. Just that. Isn’t that right?”

Blandly.

He was unshaken about Amane’s sudden forfeit.

With his pupils that saw through everything.

Seeing the unusually calm Ikki, Amane was shaken instead.

As if to hide his wavering, Amane pasted his usual nonchalant

smile...

“Y-You jest. There’s no such thing! I really like the hardworking Ikki-kun—”

“It’s about time you stop your worthless act. Amane-kun.....No, Shion Amamiya-kun.”

“_____”

In an instant, the nonchalant smile disappeared from Amane Shinomiya’s expression as if the fake mask fell off.

Part 5

(Have you heard? That Shion guy is number one in his school year again.

How nice. That guy can do any and every thing well with just luck.

Yeah yeah. And then I thought, about the fire incident in school recently. Amamiya had rescued us, but couldn't he have caused that fire in the first place? A self-directed performance.

That's possible. Even the mayor commended him. He became a hero in one go.

Those of us around him are not some extras. So disgusting.

No matter what he does, he becomes number one with just his luck. A winner in life. So envious.

But we can't bully him, because we don't know how he will retaliate against us.

Scary. If we don't act friendly on the surface like we have been doing until now.....

It would be unbearable if he caused another fire.)

—.....”

Nobody would trust him.

No matter how much effort he put in, whatever he achieved.....it would not be appreciated.

Everything scattered away like sand between his fingers.

—Aah, I also want that. Such an ability.

Such a power.....I would have been better without it.....

———— “——.....!”

The nostalgic name instantly made Amare recall his old memories and caused him a severe headache that showed on his expression.

A past that he did not want to remember.

The memory of the days when he still believed that effort would be rewarded, and desperately continued putting in effort.

.....No, right now, those memories did not matter.

Rather than that...

“.....Why does Ikki-kun know that name?”

His past that should have been erased from the world when he joined Rebellion.

Why would Ikki, who was completely unrelated, know?

Amane threw that question at Ikki.

In response, Ikki...

“I heard it from Prime Minister Tsukikage.”

Without hiding, he gave out the name of the man who visited him last night.

“Prime Minister Tsukikage told me this. Amane Shinomiya will forfeit the semi-finals for his personal reason. But that would be troublesome for Akatsuki Academy. That’s why.....Using your secret to provoke you, he wished for me to drag you into the battlefield.....And he told me about you. About how you, as the boy called Shion Amamiya, have lived your life.”

Briefly speaking, Amane was continuously swung around by his abnormal ability for half of his life.

A power that would grant whatever he wished for.

That had brought everything to Amane, but stole everything away from him at the same time.

No matter how hard he worked, how well he scored in his test, nobody would think that it was his achievement.

No matter how much effort he put in his club activities to leave a good result, nobody would acknowledge that it was his achievement.

Despite mustering up his courage to rescue his classmates from the disaster, he was accused to be the perpetrator for the disaster.

No matter how he stretched out his hands, trying to grab onto something, nothing would remain by his side.

What was there was only the result.

Only Nameless Glory.

Nobody noticed him.

Nobody believed in his potential.

Nobody looked at him in the eyes, only looking at the goddess behind him.

He was that kind of ghost-like, unacknowledged existence.

That was half of the life of Amane Shinomiya.....no, the boy known as Shion Amamiya.

And—

“Aftering hearing the story, some puzzle pieces finally connected. About the true identity of the incomprehensible disgusting feeling you possessed ever since the moment I first encountered you, I finally understood it.”

Seeing Amane’s negative pupils tainted in chaos, he recalled his memories.

The bottom of the well known as memory.

Looking up at him from the darkness, a pitch black silhouette.

Seeing that, Ikki thought that he had met Amane somewhere before, but that was not the case.

Who was that? The current Ikki could clearly comprehend.

—That was...denied of all his potential, without anyone expecting anything from him, without any hopes, treated as a 「non-existent person」, the Ikki Kurogane before meeting Ryouma.

That's right, Ikki unconsciously saw his own past self in the existence known as Amane.

.....Having no courage to believe in his own value, his weak self around the time he just closed off himself.

"I see, that's why I cannot tolerate you. That's why I sensed that disgusting feeling.....You are what I have continued to deny until today, the 「Resignation」 itself."

"——"

"And that is...Amane-kun. It is also the same for you."

Just like Prime Minister Tsukikage said. Amane was jealous of Ikki.

The same human who did not mind about not having expectations from anyone, not choosing the path of resignation, and continued to believe in his own potential, Ikki became a powerful person to the point of currently being called Another One.

—Certainly, there was no way he would not be jealous.

The reason was because Ikki had obtained the thing that he in the past.....when Amane still believed in his own potential, desperately reached out, but eventually failed to obtain.

That made Amane jealous of Ikki.....made him want to destroy his everything.

Like the him in the past, destroyed by the absolute power of Nameless Glory.

That was the raison d'être of the man known as Amane Shinomiya.

That was the motive for Amane Shinomiya taking part in Tsukikage's plan.

That was so...

"The more I hear the story, the more worthless it is."

Ikki frankly said without any sugarcoating.

"In other words, you just vented your frustration that had nowhere to go onto me. Grieving over yourself for not being rewarded, and envying the person who was rewarded. Just a sore loser throwing a tantrum.....Prime Minister Tsukikage requested me to pull you into the battle, and I also intended to do so before hearing the story for the sake of the match between Stella and me, but honestly speaking, I don't even feel like becoming your opponent anymore.

If you want to forfeit then do as you like.

If you want to interfere with the promise between Stella and me then just do as you like.

Fortune has nothing to do with me in the first place. It's just a matter of adding one more misfortune." (TL: Touma, your bosom friend)

And also—

"More importantly, for me and Stella, a showdown to the extent that can be swayed by the grumbling of a sore loser.....we don't intend to have such a low level fight."

Ikki's words did not contain any exaggeration or bluff. There was only certainty.

Ikki, who knew the true essence of the man known as Amane Shinomiya, did not even consider him as an enemy or obstacle.

A small stone on the ring. That was how he viewed him as.

Amane, who felt that intention...

"—————FUFU...AHAHAHA!"

Stifled a few laughter like hiccups, then shook his body like a broken toy and began laughing uncontrollably.

“I see.....I never told anyone about my past, but he is a Blazer that can do that kind of things.....I never thought that I would be betrayed by him, but I cannot complain since I betrayed first.

Well, in any case, if I am exposed to that extent, then it's fine to stop this act.

Yes, that's right, you are totally correct. It's exactly what Ikki-kun said. You know, I hate those who work hard. I hate those who are rewarded even more. Because isn't it unfair? I never get rewarded no matter what I do. You should have been the same as me, a worthless person.

That's why I intended to destroy your wish in the finals. Everything that you obtained. But since the story has been exposed like this, there is no meaning in waiting until the finals.....Alright.”

Amane revealed himself without showing any remorse, and manifested his Device, *Azure*, one in each of his hands.

He stabbed them into the ground vigorously...

“Then I will not forfeit after all. I’m not really interested in Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival, but I’m interested in how Ikki-kun, who has boasted so much, will fight with my Nameless Glory as my opponent. Show me. How far can you struggle under the goddess that destroyed my life!”

Saying so, he retracted the forfeit declaration single-sidedly.

Being so selfish, the referee “You, the forfeit just now—” was distressed as expected, but...

In response to the referee, Ikki manifested *Intetsu* as he spoke.

“Sure. Please start.”

“Contender Kurogane.....is it fine?”

Ikki nodded.

“I won’t purposely chase if he wants to escape, but I will take him on if he wants to face me.....Because he has taken great care of my little sister.”

“Aha. As expected of Ikki-kun. Even though you are less blessed in talent than others, you are more righteous than others. That aspect of you, although I keep saying like and like, I really hate you to the point of wanting to kill you.”

“.....!”

The evil intention Amane did not even bother to hide anymore caused the referee to feel a chill on his spine.

The crows that settled down on the dome began to raise a commotion altogether.

The sky darkened one degree further, thunder blasted in the distance.

.....It was really an unpleasant feeling.

In the end, was it alright for the two of them to fight?

Something, that's right, something.....felt like something that could not be taken back was about to happen.

However, as long as both sides confirmed their fighting spirit, there was no reason to stop the match...

“Let's GO AHEAD!”

The flame of the semi-finals second match was lit.

Part 6

The moment the announcement of the start was given, Amane dashed out with intensity.

Holding *Azure* in each hand, he shortened the distance with Ikki.

“AHAHA! I’m coming, Ikki-kun! It’s your favorite Chanbara! [\[11\]](#)”

「Oioi, is he suddenly challenging Another One in close-range!？」

「Could it be that he is strong in sword fight!？」

Amane’s enthusiastic offensive caused the audience to become noisy.

Amidst the commotion, Amane shortened to the distance of sword range...

“Torya!”

“.....!”

And swung his sword.

—It was a swing that could only look like an amateur's reckless swing.

「Wh-What the heck is that!?!」

「What's with that unstable waist! He's totally no good!」

「Th-This is terrible! I never thought that this level of sword fight will be in the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival! Th-This is really a Chanbara of a kid!」

That would naturally not reach Ikki, every hit missed.

The terrible disappointment from their expectations caused the tense audience and announcer to lose strength.

However—

「You certainly cannot feel any technique or power.....Just that, Kuro-bou's expression is serious.」

The knights with Saikyou in the lead noticed the abnormality before their eyes.

“What's with that guy.....”

“What's the matter? Stella-san.”

Shizuku asked Stella for the reason he had a grim expression.

In Shizuku's eyes, Ikki had completely handled Amane's attacks and obtained an advantage.

However, in the eyes of Stella who had walked the path of the sword, it was not reflected like that.

".....It's easy to see from the view of the onlooker. The motion does look amateurish, but the way he exerted power, pulled away, all of those are proficient without any flaw. Every single hit has a clear direction and trajectory, and they all come from the most difficult angles for Ikki to handle.....That makes him unable to carelessly counterattack."

"I-Is that so!?"

"In fact, Ikki cannot counterattack."

"—Now that you mention it....."

Shizuku finally noticed the abnormality.

That's right. Ikki did not completely handle Amane's attacks.

It looked like he did at one glance, but in actual fact, he was pushed to the extent of not being able to counterattack at all.

".....Does that guy have so much talent with the sword!?"

Amane was pushing back Ikki in sword range.

Stella wavered due to the unexpected development.

Kurono at her side explained the reason behind it.

“Most likely, this is also Nameless Glory.”

“What do you mean?”

“Shinomiya himself is just swinging his swords with his feelings. But all of that coincidentally released their most optimum potential in their motions, going to the most difficult angles for Kurogane to handle.”

No matter how low the possibility was, it could happen if it was connected to causality.

Just wishing to overwhelm Ikki in a sword fight would bend the causality to grant said wish.

That was Amane's Noble Art's — Nameless Glory's power.

Eventually, as their number of moves increased, the audience also began to notice the abnormal situation happening in the ring.

Amane, who was full of openings no matter how one looked,

was able to continue attacking that Another One.

No, on the contrary — he was suppressing him.

「.....There are also cases in A-League where a lucky hit can determine the outcome of the match. Ama-chan seems to be able to deal out such lucky hits without limit.....The attack that can overturn the match in one hit, he continued hitting for hundreds of times.」

「Truly...Bad Luck.....!」

「Aah. It is an ability more vicious than we had imagined.」

And finally, everyone could clearly see the abnormality.

Ikki, who had shown the absolute suppression power in close range in the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival, was pushed out of sword range by Amane's fierce attacks.

「Contender Kurogane has finally been pushed back! He received Contender Shinomiya's big swing and retreated back!」

「Y-You gotta be kidding!?!」

「Even though I can only see him swinging around recklessly.....!」

Receiving a strong strike from Amane, Ikki had no choice but to retreat back.

His posture was currently broken.

It was an early finishing chance for Amane.

However—

“Ah, I’m tired.”

Amane took an unbelievable action at that timing.

Not only did he not pursue, he thrust *Azure* in his hands into the ground and let go.

「C-Contender Shinomiya let go of his Device!? What kind of performance is this!？」

The venue buzzed in confusion.

However, Amane ignored the noise and smiled...

“Chanbara is strong after all! As expected of Another One. Continuing like this will never end. —Therefore.”

His empty hands displayed countless *Azure*...

“Let’s change the rhythm!”

And threw them straight up.

The countless *Azure* thrown into the cloudy sky further increased in number in the air and fell down freely after losing momentum.

They stabbed into every place on the ring like grave-markers.

However, not a single one fell towards Ikki.

What exactly was his intention for doing that?

The instant everyone felt such doubt...

“Hoi!”

Amane threw two new *Azure* towards the *Azure* stabbed into the ground ahead.

Soon after, the thrown Device hit a Device on the ground, and bounced like a bunny by using the bent blade.

「Th-This is! The swords Contender Amane had thrown are rushing about on the ring just like pinballs! Wh-What's with this impossible phenomenon!？」

「.....Hitting the swords that are stabbed in the good spots, then continuing to bounce about with good luck.....In

addition, he isn't letting them jump around at random.]

“——!”

It was at the same time the commentator Saikyou muttered that.

From both left and right, the swords that were bouncing about assaulted Ikki.

The silver bullets that closed in on him from left and right at the same time.

Though, it was easy for Ikki to repel something of that degree.

He deflected them with one strike, but—

“AHAHA. Too naive, Ikki-kun!”

Amane showered Ikki with mockery as he flicked away the incoming blades with *Intetsu*.

The reason immediately came to light.

Azure that were repelled by *Intetsu* all hit *Azure* that were nearby — and once again bounced back to aim at the center of Ikki's brows.

“Kuh...”

Ikki dodged those with his outstanding reflex and athletic ability, but the dodged *Azure* then hit the other *Azure* with good luck—

「This is...wh-what is going on!? Bounce and bounce, they hit the swords that were stabbed into the ring like grave-markers, and bounced back the blades like bullets! Like that, there will be no end to bouncing around!」

“Ahaha! Isn’t it incredible!? Yes. These are the hunting hounds that will continue to return and aim for your life even if you deflect them as long as I have the intention to pierce you. Their number will not decrease. But.....increasing it is easy.”

Saying so, Amane throw countless *Azure* from his hands once again.

They flew through the air and increased in numbers like clones, and bounced about from colliding with *Azure* stabbed on the ring.

They all turned into hunting hounds while giving off solid sounds of collision.

That number actually reached over thirty—!

That had exceeded the limit of what Ikki could handle even with his swordsmanship...

“Let me make a prophecy. Ikki-kun will lose without even being able to touch me!”

With Amane’s words as the cue, the fangs of hunting hounds pointed at Ikki in three hundred and sixty degrees from all directions at the same time.

That could not be dodged.

And there was no meaning in deflecting them.

Deflecting them only meant that the same would happen again.

Stuck in that cycle, Amane showed a smile of victory...

“Eh?”

Right after that, his eyes turned into dots.^[12]

The reason was, in the instant Ikki was about to be pierced by the countless blades, he ripped off his upper uniform and spun one round with it in his hand. He controlled his clothes like they were a dancer’s veil, and used the cloth to catch the

Azure that rushed in from all direction at the same time.

If deflecting them would make them bounce back, he just had to stop them.

Ikki, who showed that without needing to say it, remained calm without changing his expression.

And then, he closed in on Amane in the next breath.

“——!?”

Amane, who was certain that *Azure* would make Ikki into a beehive, was late to react to that counterattack...

—His cheek was slightly cut.

“Looks like you don’t have the talent in fortune telling. Amane-kun.”

“~~~~~!?!?!?”

It was only a graze, without shedding any blood.

However, the blade of *Intetsu* definitely reached.

That situation shook Amane so much that he could not rebut the provocation.

(I-Impossible.....! Even though it was a graze, to think an attack actually hit me.....!)

What exactly had happened?

He could not comprehend it at all, but Ikki would not give him that much free time to think deeply about it.

Chasing after Amane as if not letting him run away while being shaken, he pulled out *Azure* next to him and switched to two-sword style.

He trampled down Amane's defense with a combo attack that could be seen as a roaring tide, and aimed at Amane's carotid artery in a pincer attack with both swords.

The blades missed...

(Again.....!)

A shallow layer of skin on his neck was slit. In addition, the new wound even showed a trace of blood.

The blade clearly went deeper than before.

Nameless Glory was already activated.

Even though any action that could've harmed him should not have been possible.

—Why?

Amane's confusion finally erased his nonchalant smile and blood drained from his face.

He could not understand the reason, but at least he was sure that it was closing in on his own life.

“D-Damn!”

Amane cursed as he was forced into a defensive fight.

He wished to the goddess, not to defeat his opponent, not to injure his opponent, but to not get injured himself.

However, rather than stopping, Ikki's fierce attacks only increased in intensity...

「The attack and defense have turned around here! Contender Kurogane cleverly created a chance in the long range defense, and grasped the pace! Attack and attack! As if the proud Bad Luck was not functioning! Contender Shinomiya can only defend one-sidedlyyy!」

He continued advancing while sparks flew around as the metal blades collided.

Forward, forward, with certainty.

The steps taken were steady, the strikes were strong, it was exactly the usual Ikki.

That situation not only shocked Amare, but also Shizuku, who had experienced his power first-hand.

“Wh-Why? Nameless Glory is a causality interference that forcefully causes the opponent to make an error.....! Getting close would cause the feet to slip, using magic would cause the calculations to go haywire. Even though it’s such a cheating power.....”

Ikki’s movements in chasing Amare were flawless.

He did not trip and fall onto the ground like she did.

Why?

“How is Onii-sama avoiding that influence.....!?”

To Shizuku’s doubt, Kurono pointed out “That’s not it. Kurogane-imouto”

“Not it, you mean?”

“Kurogane is not avoiding the error. Amare’s causality interference is definitely working. —Vermillion. You can see it, right?”

She said so and turned her gaze towards Stella.

In response, Stella's pupils shook in admiration and envy as she nodded her head.

"Yeah.....As expected, Ikki is incredible.....!"

"What do you mean?"

"In other words, Kurogane is receiving Nameless Glory directly from the front. The strike just now makes it three times. Before was four times. If you watch carefully, you can see that Kurogane's posture is collapsing. However, he changed the slip beneath his feet to a circular motion of slash, spreading the burden on his almost snapping muscles to the muscles around them, fixing all the errors in an instant, in less than one tenth of a second."

"Such a thing can be done!? Even though there's no telling when an error could happen!?"

"It's impossible if you think about it. The errors of Nameless Glory happen far faster than the limit of reflex for humans. You will not make it in time if you think about it with your head.....However, there exists one exception. In the past, a certain famous swordsman achieved enlightenment at the end of his swordsman career — into the realm of

「Isshintou」.”

That was combining heart, body and sword into one, the essence of sword and heart as one.

Only those who trained to the extremity and crossed over countless deadly moments could arrive at that epitome.

“The swords of those swordsmen in this realm would slash their enemies faster than the wielders’ will. For any kind of change in their condition, without needing to think, their muscles, marrow and cells, with form and technique carved from the tens and hundreds of thousands of repetitions, would respond to any kind of change in condition, guiding the body into the most optimum action without the interference of mind. What Kurogane is doing is none other than this. No matter how his posture collapses, no matter what kind of unexpected situation happens, that man’s body knows how to fix it.”

Just like the idiom, even Koubou makes mistakes in his calligraphy,^[13] the accuracy of a human’s actions was poor.

Even a genius like that sometimes failed.

It was not something that could be prevented.

However, there was an anecdote that continued after the

idiom.

After Koubou Daishi hung up his calligraphy, he noticed that he forgot to write a dot, but he did not show a speck of panic for his mistake, and threw the brush in his hand at the hung calligraphy to add in that dot, and completed that magnificent calligraphy.

That's right. It's true that even geniuses could make mistakes.

However, geniuses did not fret over them.

No matter what the situation was, they would make the most optimal choice using their skills to fix it.

Hence Ikki was unwavered.

No matter what change in his condition occurred, his blade pointed at Amane's life in a straight line.

That was no longer a technique. No longer a swordsmanship.

It was pure reality that surpassed everything.

It was 「Cut you down」 — sharpened into inevitability.

“The power that can control only the extent of coincidences

will not be able to escape it forever.”

“.....!”

And then, those words of Kurono truthfully reflected the reality on the ring.

“GUAAAah!”

Blood that could been seen from afar bloomed on the ring.

Amane raised a cry of agony as he pressed his cut arm.

However, the blood could not be suppressed and dyed his white sleeve.

Deep.

The second strike was deeper than the first. The third strike was even deeper than the second—

They were closing in. Absolutely.

He did not think of why anymore.

Even Amane, who was not knowledgeable in martial arts, could comprehend at this point.

Ikki fixed his errors in the most optimal way time and time

again as he received Nameless Glory.

“To be able to, do such a thing.....!”

And towards the astonished Amane, Ikki pointed his blood-stained *Intetsu* forward and declared.

“You can understand, right? Next time. The next strike — I will definitely take your life.”

“~~~~~!”

Amane’s expression turned bitter after hearing Ikki’s KO declaration.

Just like Ikki said, he, who controlled causality, could understand.

The next strike would be the certainty he could not escape from.

—Ikki sank his body.

The final step.

He would surpass Amane’s coincidence with that step.

Before that certainty...

“.....Aah, whatever.”

Amane spoke in resignation and threw away *Azure* in his hands.

At the same time, the *Azure* stabbed into the ring all disappeared.

Then, he spat out empty praises with a tone that did not hide his frustration.

“Ah, incredible, incredible. You’re incredible, Ikki-kun. I never thought that you could struggle all the way to this point. Honestly speaking, it’s beyond my expectation. What a pity. I intended to make you struggle in vain like Shizuku-chan, and apologize to me for participating, but it seems that it won’t happen. —So, I will just end it quickly.”

“.....!”

End it quickly.

Feeling an ominous premonition from those words, Ikki’s expression tensed.

He could not understand what exactly that ominous premonition was, but—

He should not let that man speak a single word beyond that.

His instinct yelled so.

Ikki followed it, leapt from the ground, and closed in on Amane.

However — he did not make it in time.

Before the blade of *Intetsu* could reach Amane...

“Die.”

The lips of Amane that showed a thin smile weaved his killing intent without hiding.

Part 7

Die.

It was a savage word often spoken on the battlefield.

However, it was just a word no matter how violent and savage it was.

It only stopped at provoking the anger of the opponent, and could not reach the opponent's life.

However — that word coming out from Amane, who had received the indulgence of the goddess that controlled causality in the world, would not stop at mere words.

The instant that word came out of his mouth, the hand of the goddess bent the causality and pushed on to grant the result he wished for coincidentally—

“Kah——ah.”

The fangs of fate sank into Ikki's life.

Just as Ikki was about to strike Amane, he stopped in his track.

His knees bent to the ground as he vomited.

「Wh-What is this about!? Contender Kurogane, who was one step away from chasing after Contender Shinomiya, suddenly knelt down on the ground!」

「Eh, what? He fell?」

「It can't be...」

The audience were confused as they were boiling in expectation for Ikki to finish off the match like that.

Amane's voice was quiet, they could not tell what had happened.

However, on the other hand...

“H-How could it be.....!”

“Touka-chan?”

Touka, who was a high-level lightning user that could even see the microscopic electrical signals of the human anatomy, immediately realized the situation and paled.

She had never showed a more despairing expression before.

However, it was only natural if she considered what was currently happening to Ikki's body.

She caught onto the situation. —The instant Ikki's heart stopped.

Then, towards the venue that was shaken from the incomprehensible development, Amane's mockery echoed.

“AHA! 「The next strike, I will definitely take your life」
Sparkle! Was it? AHAHA! Could it be that you seriously thought that you could surpass my Nameless Glory? That's impossi~ble. My Nameless Glory is a power that can make any existing causality happen, you know? In that case, if I feel like it, I can just stop a heart or two of the human body, which has many uncertainties!”

「Wh-Whaaat?!?!」

「S-Stopping the heart, you're joking!?!」

The audience stand generated noises of disbelief at Amane's words.

If he could not stop the swordsmanship, he would stop the life itself.

If there was no meaning in errors of swordsmanship, he would cause an error in the life's activity itself.

He was even able to do such a thing.

If Amane could do such a thing, there was nothing Ikki could do against it.

Amane's expression showed joy at the frightened commotion.

"Yes, that's right. There's nothing you can do. My Nameless Glory has the absolute enforcement that directly interferes with causality. In other words, fate itself. No effort can be a substitute for it.....I know it the best. Because of this power, my life has been wasted.

I can overcome it if I put in effort. You might have thought so, but that's being optimistic. How is it? Ikki-kun. 'You cannot win against my Nameless Glory', if you acknowledge that, you can still make it if you surrender now, you know?"

Amane asked in a teasing tone, Ikki glared back without a word.

Amane snorted at his futile resistance.

"I see. You cannot speak because your heart has stopped. Well, that rebellious glare is a clear answer.....In that case, it can't be helped."

Then, Amane moved closer to the kneeling Ikki, raised his white blade...

“If you bear a grudge, then blame yourself for not knowing your position.”

And swung down at his nape.

“Ikki!!!!”

“Oniisamaa——!!!!”

“AHAHA!”

And the blade struck amidst Stella and Shizuku’s cries.

The blade split apart the skin as if licking it, cut the flesh, and severed the bone.

What spilled out was an abundant amount of blood.

The ominous cluster amaryllis bloomed across the white ring.
That was...

“Go...buh.....!?”

All of it, from the left side of his abdomen to the right shoulder, came from Amane’s body.

Part 8

「「「.....Eh?」」」

After finishing the work of stopping his heart, Amane was about to finish him off.

However, right after everyone thought that it was over, it was Amane and not Ikki, who bled.

In an instant, the unexpected outcome stunned the audience, but...

Seeing the figure of the collapsed Amane on the ground, their comprehension caught up.

Ikki had taken the control of that bout by returning a slash at the last moment.

「「「O-OOOooOoOooOoh!!!!」」」

「C-Counterattack! He cut him down instantly when we thought it was too late! Contender Shinomiya collapsed on his knees! His fresh blood made a puddle on the ring! That's a lot of bleeding! Deep! That wound is deep!」

“~~~~~!?!?”

Amane fell onto the ground with all his limbs touching.

His expression was dyed in shock — to the point that he could not even feel the pain.

(Wh-What just happened.....!?)

He could not comprehend.

Nameless Glory did not activate?

No, that was impossible.

That had never happened before.

The wheel of fate definitely moved according to his will.

Ikki's heart unmistakably stopped.

And if the heart stopped, the body could not move.

It was obvious. The heart was the pump that delivered the blood, which contained the oxygen needed throughout the entire body as its energy source.

Without gasoline circling through it, an engine could not operate, if the oxygen and energy in the blood did not circle around, the human body would not move.

Ikki's body died.....—No, he should've already been dead at that moment.

He should not have been able to counterattack.

(Even so, how did he move? How did he cut me!?)

“Y-You.....what did you do.....!?”

The confused Amane sought that answer from Ikki, who was standing there without any trace of difficulty.

In response, Ikki looked down at him...

“I moved my stopped heart myself.”

Said so as if it was nothing.

「Ah! I see, so that's how it is! Haha, seriously!」

Saikyou, on the commentator seat, applauded at Ikki's reply.

「S-Saikyou-sensei! What does this mean!？」

「It's just like what Kuro-bou said. Kuro-bou's heart definitely stopped once. But Kuro-bou made it move by himself, counterattacked and turned the table around.」

「Wha.....!? M-Move you say, is that possible!？」

「AHAHA. No, well, I won't be able to do it, you know? That's because the heart is not something you can move with your will. Heart muscles thump according to the automatic orders given by the "Pacemaker cells". That does not involve human will. It is purely the flesh's rhythm maker.....But if it's Kuro-bou, he can do it. After all, he has been doing it all the time until now.」

「Eh?」

「It's the swordsmanship of Twin-Wings. A swordsmanship that moves all the muscles in the body together in an instant. The signal that sends orders from the brain is important, but there is something else more important. That is blood. If there isn't enough energy supplied by the blood, it will not be possible to move all the muscles in the body together. But that amount of energy cannot be supplied by the blood pressure under normal pulsation. That's natural. A human body is not made with the swordsmanship of Twin-Wings in mind.

Then what to do? There is one answer. You can only greatly increase the standard of life activities, and consciously boost the pulse and blood pressure. In other words, if he could not do something like moving his heart with his mind, there would be nothing to talk about. Kuro-bou is using such a

sword technique. And if he could move his heart with his mind, there would not be a problem if the “pacemaker cell” made some irregular movement. It is just something like switching from auto to manual.」

The explanation from Saikyou was right on the mark without any mistakes.

Ikki did just what she pointed out, by delegating the brain to control his heart muscle activity the moment his heart’s autorhythmic beating stopped.

He consciously moved his heart and picked himself up immediately.

And the “pacemaker cell” was equipped with the function of rebooting by itself once stopped using external stimulation such as heart massage or electric shock .

「That means, the “Die” just now did not deal any damage to Kuro-bou. While Ama-chan believed that he had won and closed in without any guard. Closing in on that Another One. It is a big failure that can only be called as carelessness. That is a fatal wound.」

「C-Certainly.....You can tell that the wound is very deep from the amount of bleeding.」

「It's not just that. Ama-chan's ability is the power to change causality to suit himself.....Kuro-bou pretending that his heart stopped and luring him to close in foolishly is not possible normally. That kind of mistake should've been prevented by Nameless Glory interfering. But.....it was not prevented this time. In short, the moment he overcame the ultimate causality interference of taking one's life, their power difference had been set in stone.」

Amane Shinomiya could not win against Ikki Kurogane.

That truth was an inevitability that would not be shaken no matter how the causality changed, the goddess that protected Amane yielded.

Amane's fatal wound was the proof. In that case—

「The outcome has been decided. As long as Nameless Glory does not work, Ama-chan, who is relying solely on that, has no chance of winning.」

“~~~~~!”

Amane's expression paled from Saikyou's explanation. Just like what she said, the situation of him getting such a wound should not have been originally possible.

Since that happened, it meant that the Nameless Glory that

should be absolutely invincible was suppressed.

(Impossible.....!)

However, Amane could not accept it.

“I wished for your death.....! And then, that wish was granted! Then obediently die.....! Why won’t you give up!?”

Amane opened his eyes as widely as he could and glared at Ikki.

In response, Ikki looked down at him with calm eyes and said.

“It’s not really something unusual. Causality interference ability can only trigger something that can happen. Then having this result is only natural. Amane-kun seems to have a really high evaluation of your own power, but this level of power.....is not rare in the world of knights.”

“.....!?”

“It’s certainly a versatile and convenient ability, but.....that’s all it is.

I know.

There is a knight who has the power to make the arrows he shot undetectable, let alone his own figure.

There is a knight who has the speed to be able to split a descending lightning bolt in half with her swing.

There is a knight who can freely manipulate heat that can rival the sun.

Any one of those is a strong ability that does not lose to your power.

Then these knights, who possess such power, are aiming at the single summit, betting on their own possibilities desperately with the belief of 「I will not lose to anyone」, that is the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival. I have won through such battles and stood on this stage today.”

In that case—

“You are only trying to trip others because you are jealous of them.....there is no way I would lose to a guy who can’t even win against himself.”

Right after Ikki pierced Amane with his words like his blade...

“~~~~~Ge...hah!?!?”

Blood sprayed out from Amane’s mouth and wound vigorously, and he collapsed in a puddle of his own blood.

He tried to move his limbs and pull himself up immediately, but was unable to.

(Cannot...stand.....!?)

He could not rely on his arms or legs, as if they had lost their bones.

His body was rapidly losing strength along with blood.

No matter how much Amane wished to stand, no strength entered his four limbs.

No, it was not only that.

(Da...rk.....)

Night fell in his sight.

Darkness fell in his consciousness.

Amane finally understood the unacceptable reality at that point.

—Just like what Saikyou said, the fight was already decided.

And then...

“That’s it! Winner, Ikki Kurogane!!”

The referee’s voice echoed in his ear from afar within his fading consciousness, turning the unacceptable reality into an unshakable past of certainty.

Amane Shinomiya...Nameless Glory, had been defeated right then.

(Like that.....is it something at the level that can be easily overcome like that?)

He sank amidst the puddle of blood, unable to believe it even at the moment he was about to lose consciousness.

Because there was no wish that could not be granted if he used Nameless Glory.

To think that just an F-Rank Knight, who did not know when to give up, could overcome it.

And he did it without a single injury, not even using his trump card Ittou Shura.

With such a cool expression.

(Even though it’s only that level.....is my everything going to be robbed away?)

——Really?

The moment he asked himself that...

Please make me happy. Shion-chan.

Even though the cheers for the winner was so far, her voice could be heard so close to his ear.

Part 9

—Amane Shinomiya, or Shion Amamiya, awakened as a Blazer at a very young age.

It was a time when he was loyal to his desires and did not know how to restrain himself.

He activated that unnatural fortune without a care, allowing the surrounding people to know about his power.

That casted a shadow on his elementary school life later on.

No matter how much effort he put in to get a good score in tests, no matter how hard he worked to achieve in sports...

—That guy was cheating.

Such gossips continued.

Students, teachers, everyone hated Amane and were one-sidedly afraid of him.....treating him like a non-existing person.

However, that was also something that could not have been helped.

He would call for Nameless Glory whenever he had an

impulse of desire from his heart. Was the achievement Amane obtained really the result of his own effort, was it just an interference of the goddess, was it real, it was unclear even to himself.

However, because Amane himself was unclear, he hoped to be acknowledged by a third person.

It was not luck. He wished to be praised that it was his own achievement.

However, that did not come true, nevermind acknowledging him, even saving the students from the fire that broke out in school got him accused for orchestrating the fire incident to stand out.....finally, Amane stopped going to school and holed up in his home.

However, Amane's mother, who was living together with him, did not blame him.

「It's alright. Mother knows that Shion-chan is a gentle child who would not do such a thing.」

To Amane, his mother, who consoled his crying self like that, was his only ally.

「It's not only mother. God naturally knows as well. Because the God knows, the gentle Shion-chan was given such an

amazing power. Use this power to become happy. That's why — please make me happy. Shion-chan.」

Amane still remembered the warmth of that hug even right now.

His mother, who had divorced his father when he was a baby and raised him up all by herself.

He loved his gentle and strong mother very much.

That's why he always wished for her happiness.

Probably thanks to that, his mother's job was sailing smoothly, allowing them to live a comfortable life.

—He became happy.

Even if nobody in school acknowledged him, there was a place where he belonged.

There was his mother, who had acknowledged and loved him.

Then, wouldn't that be enough? He thought so.

—However, on one of those days, Amane suddenly felt a doubt.

Would mother still love him if he did not have such power?

Could it be that what she loved was not himself, but his power that could bring in riches?

—The uncertainty that germinated took root in his heart deeply.

It was hard. So hard that he wanted to cry.

Mother's smile directed at him was filled with warmth and love.

He could not help detesting himself for doubting that smile. However, no matter how much he tried to convince himself, the uncertainty could not be erased, churning up inside his heart like a centipede crawling around in his stomach.

He could not endure it anymore.

Hence he made up his mind.

For one day, just one day, he would stop using his power, and confirm it.

Everything collapsed in an instant

「Hey, why? Even though mother loves Shion-chan so much, why won't Shion-chan love mama back?」

On that day, a bank in America bankrupted. A major panic occurred around the world.

That impact directly hit his household as they lived on stock trading, causing them to go into a big debt in one day.

His mother became angry and violently shook Amane.

And that overly intense violence let Amane understand.

It was not only the people in the school.

Even his biological mother did not need the human called Shion Amamiya.

What she loved was his power.

What she sought was only fortune.

He was not treated as her child without that power.

—Once he realized that, he could not do anything well anymore.

Once Amane realized that his mother did not look at Shion Amamiya, no matter how hard he worked, he could not wish for his mother's happiness.

Nameless Glory was a power that responded to the wishes from Amane's heart.

Hence, the wish could not be granted if it did not come from his heart.

As a result, his mother got more and more angry, and the violence called discipline changed from interrogation to abuse.

Beating and kicking became natural. Not being given meals also became an obvious matter.

He was stripped naked, put into a cage for rabbits, and hot water was poured at him.

Of course, the cage was locked so he could not get out.

He could not even dodge in the small rabbit cage, only cries of agony continued.

Amane screamed from the pain of his scalded skin bloating and peeling off, and desperately begged.

'I'm sorry, please forgive me.'

He believed that one day, his voice would reach his mother if he continued begging like that.

However, his begging was not heard until the end.

His mother's answer was always decided beforehand.

—If you want me to stop, then make me happy.

Make me happy

Make me happy

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—Then, after that hell continued for about half a year...

As always, fate answered Amane's heart which finally hated

his mother.

「Shion, are you alright!? I'm glad, I'm really glad that I made it in time.....!」

The person who saved the dying Amane from the cage was a middle-aged man dyed in his mother's blood.

He vaguely remembered. That was his father.

「It's already fine. Your scary mother is no more!」

He hugged the skinny and frail Amane while shedding tears...

And spoke with a similar smile as his mother.

「Therefore —— please love your father from now on.」

In an instant, Shion Amamiya understood.

That world.....did not need Shion Amamiya.

And at the same time.....he finally gave up on himself.

A power that could grant any wish. The absolute power that could destroy the love between blood-related family members.

If such a thing was behind him, it could not be helped that his own existence did not enter their eyes.

When he gave up, his heart felt a little easier.

Even so, only that.....even though that helplessness was his only salvation——



Part 10

“That’s it. Winner, Ikki Kurogane!!”

Seeing the amount of blood the fallen Amame shed on the ring, the main referee immediately announced the end of the match and the winner’s name.

Due to his long years of experience, he decided that it would be impossible to continue anymore.

Cheers of joy erupted from the venue.

「The main referee has judged that Contender Shinomiya is unable to continue the battle anymore! He has declared the end of the match! The Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival semi-finals second match’s winner is Contender Another One, Ikki Kuroganeeee!!!!」

「A-Alright! Ikki-kun won!」

「Eh, seriously? Is it already over?」

「It somehow looks boring.....such a one-sided match.」

「The venue erupted in cheers! However, I can hear voices of confusion amidst that! That’s also natural! The match began with a declaration of forfeit, the semifinal of Bad Luck vs

Another One was filled with extreme confusion! Once the mystery was unveiled, Contender Kurogane more or less advanced the match one-sidedly, eventually taking down Contender Shinomiya without a single injury!

However, this was only because Contender Kurogane trained his body techniques beyond the limit!

This victory was only “inevitable” because it was him!

And with this victory, Contender Kurogane will be advancing to the finals!

For the first time in history, an F-Rank Knight is reaching for the title of the Seven Stars Sword King!」

“Incredible! Incredible, Ikki! To be able to completely dominate the match against an opponent with that kind of unreasonable power!”

The result of that match made Arisuin at the audience stand applause in joy.

He also witnessed Amane’s out-of-norm power, and was worried that it would not be easy to break out of it in that fight, so he was very happy.

And as he wanted to share his joy of the victory, he turned

towards Shizuku at his side.

“Isn’t it great, Shizuku!”

However — rather than being happy at the victory before her eyes...

“——.....”

With a serious expression, she watched the ring that had already determined the outcome.

“Shizuku?”

Arisuin asked her what was it, but Shizuku did not answer.

No, she could not answer.

(.....What is it, this.....)

Why was she unable to feel happy for the victory of her own brother, she could not understand.

And that feeling was not something only Shizuku felt.

His lover, Stella, who was watching Ikki’s match together in that place, also felt a strong sense of unease.

They could not understand.

The main referee had declared the end of the match, and announced the winner to be Ikki.

In other words, his victory could not be overturned.

Everything was already set in stone.

Even Amane could not overturn it.

Even so...

(Even though the match has already ended.....)

For some reason — an irritating feeling was expanding in acceleration.

And that reason was...

“Watch ouuut!!!!”

Along with Ikki’s warning, became clear.

Part 11

After announcing the winner's name, the main referee bent down next to the fallen Amene.

Then he confirmed the his condition.

The wound was pretty deep as the bleeding was severe.

It was a very dangerous situation.

That's why he used his own magic to stop the bleeding with healing magic before the medical team arrived.

However...

"Eh....."

The instant he used healing on Amene.

—He made eye contact.

With the muddy pupils that snapped open.

Right after that...

"——You are in the way."

Black fog, no, like flames, thick magic power that could be seen by the naked eye blew out from Amane's entire body.

And then, the flame-like black magic power took the form of a few 「arms」, and reached out for the main referee's neck.

“Hii...”

“Watch out!!!!”

Ikki was the one who reacted to that abnormality earlier.

He pushed the main referee, who was frozen still from the sudden situation, away to protect him from the pursuing arms of black flame.

「W-WWWW-What has happieeeened!?!? Some things looking like black arms suddenly appeared from Contender Amane's body and attacked the referee!」

He attacked the referee after the match was over.

Iida raised his voice at the sudden abnormal situation...

「.....O-Oi oi , what's with that power.....!」

Saikyou at the side also stood up from the commentator seat with an astonished expression.

However, she was not shocked because Amane attacked the main referee.

—It was the result of coming into contact with the black arm.

(It's decaying.....!)

Ikki's pupils also shook in shock on the ring.

After protecting the main referee, he looked at the black arm that passed by him from the side, and saw it.

The portion of the ring that the black arm grabbed collapsed as if it had weathered and was blown away by the wind.

And without stopping, it was spreading out slowly to the surrounding.

(This power is.....)

“Amane-kun.....”

Ikki returned his gaze on Amane.

Amane was no longer lying on the ground.

He stood up slowly like a haunted ghost, and murmured with a voice like a curse.

“Don’t...joke.....I...will not lose.....My Nameless Glory is an invincible power.....There is no such thing as impossibility. There is no wish that cannot be granted.....It has been like that until now. That’s why...that’s why I even made myself give up.....! By now, my house, my family, my friends.....even myself, when everything is already gone, telling me that this isn’t how it is.....there is no way I can accept it.....!”

The blood-shot pupils opened to their limits.

From the two corners, just like blood.....tears were falling.

“I won’t acknowledge it.....”

He spat out mutterings like agonized cries.

Amane said. —I will never acknowledge you.

Ikki Kurogane. A failure born in a famous household.

Originally, he should have given up with his worthless F-Rank.

However, that man did not give up on his own worth, and obtained the glory impossible for an F-Rank.

The moment he knew of that existence, he could only feel disgust.

Because when he saw that man.....it was like seeing a dream.

He could still do it if he tried.

If he had the courage to believe in himself like that man, he could have a different path than the present.

That kind of thorn-filled dream.

And he almost started to hate his current self.

—No joke.

When he already lost his family, friends and even himself, and finally gave up.

Stop showing him something like a dream.....!

“.....An eyesore.....You are.....!”

“——.....You are...”

“Kurogane get down! Leave the rest to us!”

When Ikki was about to say something, a sharp voice rang out from the rowdy venue.

It was the voice of Hagun Academy's Director, Kurono Shinguuji.

She manifested her Device, and leapt off from above the fence.

“Everyone, suppress that guy!”

She instructed the Mage-Knights at the venue.

Receiving that instruction, the Mage-Knights standing by at the audience stand moved out together.

However, to the movement of those knights, Amane...

“Don't...interfereeeeeeeeeee!!!!”

Raised an angry scream, shooting out hundreds of black arm from his body and stretching them out towards the audience stand. Seeing that situation, Saikyou called out to the Mage-Knights in the venue through the mic.

「All members, open up magic barriers! Don't let that black flame touch your body!」

「「「————!!!!」」」

The professional staff chosen for the smooth running of the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival immediately reacted.

Every individual erected a barrier with magic to correspond.

The black arms that hit the barrier made from magic and scraped against the invisible barrier like claws scratching a window glass. Fortunately, nobody was hit due to their quick response.

「U-UWAAAA!?!?」

「KyAAaAAAAA!!!!」

「Wh-What is this.....!」

Screams of the audience echoed here and there in the venue.

A portion of the black arms pierced into the ground of the audience stand and the fence, and those places collapsed in the same weathered state Ikki and Saikyou witnessed before. In addition, the collapse spread out from the places where the black arms pierced them like an ink dripped onto a white cloth.

Iida raised a confused voice seeing that scene.

「This is.....! Weathering!? The places that magic in the shape of black arms released by Contender Shinomiya touched are collapsing as if they are weathered down! B-But how did this happen!? Causality interference ability is a power that makes

phenomenons that exist as possibilities to happen! However, the durability of the reinforced concrete that is used to construct this venue is over hundreds of years! There should be no possibility of it weathering.....!」

「He changed the way he used the ability.....」

「Saikyou-sensei?」

「Ama-chan has not controlled his own power up to now. He mainly used only the spilled out portion. It's a strong ability that doesn't need more than that. But.....those black arms are different. Nameless Glory's power is concentrated to the point of being visible to the naked eye. And doing that raised the enforcement power.....!」

Saikyou's examination was correct.

Amane concentrated his causality interference to raise the absoluteness exactly like what she said.

That was really to the point of reaching the 「result」 without the need of 「process」.

And currently, Amane had only one thought imbued in his power.

Killing intent.

In other words—

「Those black arms ignore the method and process, becoming the hands of a reaper that push for the “death” result that all things cannot avoid! Just being grazed by it will send you to the afterlife! There will be casualties if we dawdle around.....! Bro! I will leave the evacuation guidance of the audience to you!」

「Wh-What will Saikyou-sensei do!?!」

「I will go suppress that kid! Since Ku-chan and the others are having their hands full with protecting the audience!」

Saying so, Saikyou manifested her Device *Benihiro Ageha*, and blew away the windows of the broadcast stand with a horizontal swing. Then she wrapped her whole body in an armor of magic with such a concentration that could be recognized by sight and leapt out from the window frame.

She intended to fly and land on the ring.

However—

“That isn’t necessary.”

Ikki on the ring stopped Saikyou’s action.

「Kuro-bou.....?」

“Sensei, please protect the audience stand. I will stop him.”

Part 12

He would stop Amane himself.

The person who disagreed was Kurogane at the audience stand.

“Don’t say stupid things, Kurogane! You have already won! There is no need for you to go any further!”

“No. With the property of Amane-kun’s ability, not a single mistake can be allowed in the protection of the audience stand. Thinning out the defence is dangerous.....Also, I saw myself in him.”

“Kurogane.....!”

“Even though the match has already been decided and he has lost his consciousness and taken plenty of injuries, he is still challenging me like this. Then.....I cannot turn my back on such an enemy.”

Saying so, Ikki took his stance against Amane.

He did not intend to leave that place.

It was only natural from Ikki’s perspective.

Not to mention, finally, at that moment...

“You are finally making a better expression. Amane-kun.”

Amane finally showed him his true self after putting on a fake mask ever since their first meeting.

(.....I understand them. Those feelings of yours.)

「My Nameless Glory is an invincible power.....There is nothing impossible. There is no wish that cannot be granted.....It has been like this ever since. That's why, that's why I was even able to give up on myself.....!」

Finding a reason to give up on himself represented the feeling of not wanting to give up.

Despite living, he had to give up all his potential himself.

Normal people would not have the nerve to do that.

It was more difficulty than suicide in a sense. That's why a reason was necessary.

He needed a reason that could convince himself no matter how forceful it was.

To Amane, the absoluteness of Nameless Glory was probably it.

.....What feelings Amane had poured into his screams, Ikki painfully comprehended them.

(I was also like that.)

A failure born into a powerful famous household.

The value of the human Ikki Kurogane was denied, and nobody expected anything of him since his childhood.

He also used his talentless self as a reason, and was about to give up on his own potential.

He was cornered to the point that he had no choice but to do that.

However, at that time, Ikki had an encounter.

「Are you frustrated, brat? Then, don't discard that frustration. That's the proof that you haven't given up on yourself.」

With a man who gave him the courage to continue believing in his own potential.

Because there was that encounter, he was able to continue fighting to the present.

Ikki was conscious of it.

However.....Amane, no, Shion Amamiya did not have that.

He did not have Ryuuma Kurogane, Shizuku Kurogane, Stella.....he had nobody.

Be it his friends or family, nobody looked at him, only looking at his power.

His own existence had no place in the world.

He had been wandering like a ghost in the barren world with that kind of ultimate isolation.

He told himself that he had a reason to give up as it couldn't be helped.

.....Ikki knew how harsh that was.

(Then—)

What he should do was already decided.

He had always wished to become a person that could give courage to someone who could not believe in his own potential — that's why he walked on the path of knighthood!

“You probably cannot tolerate me. You probably cannot

forgive me.

Then bring along all of your hatred and challenge me!

With my weakest, I will defeat your resignation.....!"

Telling him strongly that he would accept his challenge, Ikki activated his trump card, Ittou Shura.

He stepped forward towards Amane while clad in blue light.

"U...aAAaAAAAAAAAA!!!!!"

Amane raised a cry in response and lashed out countless reaper's arms that manifested his killing intent.

Amane was way stronger in terms of magic power.

Ittou Shura's level of magic power could not even be considered an armor.

Just a graze from a reaper's hand would probably take Ikki's life.

However, Ikki did not escape or show any wavering despite knowing it and moved forward—

"HAaaa!!!!!"

With the swordsmanship that could be called the fastest, he cut down the reaper's hands that pursued him like a wave of spears and moved forward.

He could not be stopped.

Not even a single step.

Not even a single moment.

Like the moonlight splitting apart the darkness of night.

The blue light scattered the pressuring black flame.

The powerful figure of that strength had stopped the feet of the audience that should've been escaping from Amane's rampage, making them focus on the ring.

「I-Incredible.....!」

「Even though he won the match already, does he intend to carry it by himself to the end!?!」

Even though Ikki did not have the obligation to do that.

The audience could not understand for what reason was Ikki doing that much.

However, even so—

His side face had conveyed that he had some sort of strong determination.

Therefore...

「Gooo! Don't lose, Kurogane!」

「Take that cheating bastard down!」

「Do your best! Ikki-kun!」

Despite the fact that the match they should've been cheering was already over, the audience sent cheers of support to Ikki.

And as if responding to that, Ikki further increased his speed.

Saikyou understood it after seeing that scene.

「Concentrating has brought out a flaw.」

「A flaw?」

「That's right. Certainly, if it's the Nameless Glory that is concentrated to the point of being visible, it will go straight to "death" while ignoring any and all processes. Kuro-bou can't do anything about it no matter what he tries.

But.....concentrating the causality power of "death" has killed off the greatest advantage of Nameless Glory.」

「The greatest advantage...is?」

「The coincidence. Since Ama-chan has “only been wishing” until now.

That would be great, I wish it can be like this.

That’s why his “will” cannot be read. What kind of causality change will happen cannot be predicted.

After all, even the person who used the Noble Art does not know what kind of effect there will be.

In fact, Kuro-bou only fixed the errors caused by Nameless Glory and had never avoided it once in the match.

But now is different. The strong power of causality interference that can be seen by the naked eyes are moving according to the clear killing intent of Ama-chan. Ama-chan himself is controlling it. Then — even thousands of reaper’s hands do not matter.

Reading the intention of opponents. —That’s the most proficient field of the Worst One.....!」

In addition, Amane himself also using that kind of ability for the first time, and could not move proficiently.

That kind of half-baked power would not work on Ikki.

In that case...

「Kuro-bou! You stopped me with such manly words. I will leave this fight to you! Take responsibility and make that idiot behave!」

Saikyou took a posture to fly out at any time and told him through the mic.

And then, at the same time Saikyou spoke those words—

“~~~~~!!!!”

Ikki finally caught Amane in sword range.

Amane's expression was grim, but he did not retreat.

If he turned tail even once, he would be cut down from behind just like that.

He understood that.

He manifested *Azure* in his two hands.

His blades, wrapped with the result of 「death」, counterattacked.

That shape was death itself.

That's only natural. If he lost that fight, his resignation would only be an excuse.

He had already lost too much to accept it by then.

(Just grazing him is fine! Just grazing his skin a bit will be my win!)

“UAAaah!”

With a painful scream, Amane swung his two swords.

However — the slashes he made drew only weak and coarse tracks.

It was similar to what Amane showed immediately after the match began, but not quite the same.

It was a bonafide amateur Chanbara.

Currently, when Nameless Glory's power was concentrated towards the vector of 「death」, he was moving without the blessing of fortune, unable to strike at the angles where Ikki's defence was weak, not even able to properly swing his swords on the right track.

And that kind of slash would not work on Ikki...

“_____”

He easily guarded the two swords with a flash Amane's eyes could not even capture.

The impact sent *Azure* flying far behind.

No matter what he did, he could not stop Ikki's steps.

Amane painfully felt his own weak self unwillingly through that fact.....and ground his teeth.

Frustrating.

He resented his weak self.

(.....Since when has it been, I wonder. When did I start resenting my own powerlessness so much.....)

He had long forgotten that feeling.

A power that could grant any kind of wish.

Amane was born possessing such abnormality, but he was unable to obtain anything.

Everything was snatched away from his hands by the 「Nameless Glory」.

Hence he gave up his desires.

Since no matter how much he wished for, he would not be able to obtain anything with his own hands.

However—

Aah, however—

“U...aAAaAAa———!”

“““!?”””

—Right after, everyone, including Ikki, held their breaths from the shock.

It was the moment when Amane’s resistance was subdued, when everyone believed that Ikki had settled the showdown.

The amateur swordsman Amane manifested his Device in his two hands again, and stepped up to slash back at Ikki.

And that was a slash with proper trajectory and timing that should not be possible for an amateur.

Was it the fortune caused by Nameless Glory?

No. —The power's vector was concentrated on 「death」, Amane, who wrapped it around his swords, could not use it.

That counterattack was purely from Amane's.....Amane's own body technique.

He had traced the sword's path and posture many times under the control of his fortune, making them his own at the last minute without relying on his ability.

Ikki barely defended Amane's unexpected counterattack with his blade.

However, at that instant, for certain, he had stopped Ikki, who was unstoppable no matter what he did, for nearly an instant.

At that —— Amane betted all of himself and increased his counterattacks!

(I want to win.....)

His steps were firm, and for the first time in the match — he advanced.

What pushed his body on was the desire that he could not discard no matter how much he gave up or deceived himself.

(I want to win.....!)

—Isn't it great? That guy can do anything with just luck.

—No matter what he does, he can be number one with just luck.

—Please make me happy. Shion-chan.

—That's why, please love father from now on.

Nobody would look at him, nothing could be held in his hands.

That kind of dead and yet alive, ghost-like life.

It would be fine no matter how small.

It would be fine no matter how trivial.

Just something that he could confirm to be his, something that he could definitely grab on.

He wanted to shout that he definitely existed in the world by obtaining it.

Currently, it was right before his eyes.

The victory that could not be obtained by the goddess that had been wrecking his life.

In that case—

(I must win!)

If he had managed to obtain it, he would feel like smiling for the first time from the bottom of his heart.

“UOOoOoOoOooOooooo!!!!”

Amane’s scream was no longer cries, but changed to a roar filled with strong determination.

He made a left thrust.

The tip of his sword followed the fastest trail to pursue Ikki.

Intetsu stopped the unexpected counterattack from the right and was in no position to guard that.

It would pierce Ikki’s life unconditionally.

—At that instant...

“Second Secret Sword — Rekkou.”

“——Ah.”

Before the thrust with Amane's full power reached Ikki's skin, the black blade that suppressed *Azure* on the right was swung and severed Amane's final strength.

Part 13

“—.....”

Reverse diagonal, a flash. Amane, who was cut, fell to his knees.

Second Secret Sword Rekkou.

That was a zero distance slash by using only the lower body's spring power and waist's twist to dish out a strike when the posture was stiff after receiving the opponent's sword. A sunkei^[14] using sword.

Doing so, Ikki deflected Amane's right sword and countered his thrust together.

And that strike had definitely finished Amane off for sure.

The 「death」 colored magic power flowing out from his body evaporated like fog.

Ikki did not make any follow-up attacks.

Amane also did not struggle to stand up.

They both understood.

Those fallen knees could not withstand anything further.

(Even though it's so close, how far it is.)

Exhausting his very best, exhausting all his strength, he could not squeeze out anything more...

.....He could not deal a single wound.

Painfully feeling the difference in ability between the two, Amane dropped his waist to sit like seiza on the ground. And...

“.....It's...my loss.....”

Right then for sure, he accepted the reality before his eyes.

“Are you frustrated?”

“.....Yes. That's right.....I'm frustrated.”

Amane kept quiet for a while at the question and replied with a small nod.

Frustrated.

The feeling that was more bitter than the blood rushing up his mouth could only be described as such.

To Amane's reply — Ikki said.

“Don't throw away that frustration. That is the proof that Amane-kun has not given up on himself.”

“.....Eh?”

Those words seemed to see through Amane's struggle in his own heart, making him raise his head to look up.

The reflection in his eyes was like that of a light seeping through from a cloud dispersing unknowingly and...

Ikki, who's back was facing the light and looking at him, showed a gentle smile that he had not seen before.

“A long time ago, when I was suffering similarly like you, a certain person said that. The feeling known as frustration, no matter how harsh, no matter how bitter, is something you cannot throw away. As long as you hold an indomitable feeling, humans can reach the moon.

.....That's why, this time I will give you those words .

If you feel frustrated, anytime you want, for any number of times, just keep challenging.

What your power, which can grant any wish, could not grant,

was a victory against me. If you are able to obtain it, that victory will be something belonging to you that you can be proud of. Something you would win with your own power, your own glory.”

“.....Ah.”

“I will definitely become a man that won’t be ashamed of being your goal — to receive your challenge.”

Saying so, Ikki turned around and showed his back to Amane.

And he left the ring without turning back.

That steel-like sturdy back seemed to be telling him to catch up.

(Aah, I see.....)

Amane was finally enlightened thanks to that back.

The reason Ikki ignored Kurono’s interference and continued the battle after winning.

He had been watching.

The one who even he himself had given up on — at Shion Amamiya.

(.....I can't win against him.)

Deceiving him, making him suffer, hurting his little sister.

He would even help a guy like that.

How to become so strong like him?

How to become so gentle like him?

Amane could not comprehend it when he could not even tolerate himself.

However, what if.....

If he reached the place by chasing after that back...

—That was definitely the target he was aiming for by betting his life's journey.

Amane squeezed out the last ounce of his strength and stretched out his hand towards that distancing back.

And then, he grabbed strongly.

Of course, that hand would not grasp anything.

It would not reach Ikki's sleeve.

—For now.

However, someday, someday for sure——

Amane carved that burning frustration into his heart and fell on the spot.

Part 14

「Right now, Contender Shinomiya has been restrained by the medical team and carried away.

Really, what an unexpected commotion happened at the very end, but luckily, the excellent Mage-Knights have followed up and prevented casualties from appearing. As expected of the elites chosen for the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival.

However, the person we should praise the most is, as expected, Contender Ikki Kurogane.

After the end of the match, regardless of the storm-like development, he did not receive a single injury. Showing an overwhelming difference in abilities, he incapacitated the rampaging Contender Bad Luck, Amane Shinomiya.

In tomorrow's finals, this overly strong F-Rank Knight will be facing against the true absolute powerhouse, Crimson Princess, Stella Vermillion, who possesses the world's highest magic power. It can't be helped that we are looking forward to it even now.」

While hearing the voice of the announcer praising Ikki flowing within the dome, Shizuku rushed to where Ikki was.

“Shizuku! You will trip if you rush like that!”

Arisuin cautioned her from behind, but it did not reach her ears.

(Onii-sama has won! Onii-sama has finally reached the finals.....!)

Because she had lived together with Ikki since young, she was happier than anyone else.

She wanted to celebrate it immediately.

She wanted to congratulate him from the bottom of her heart.

Thinking so, Shizuku could no longer sit around and rushed to the contender waiting room.

And then...

“Onii-sama!”

She threw open the door of the waiting room intensively and called out to her brother.

However...

“.....”

Her brother was certainly in the room, but he was leaning on the gate that connected to the dome and did not respond.

She could see that his eyes were closed, and did not respond when two people entered the waiting room.

“Oh, is he asleep?.....Well, although he did not get injured, he still used Ittou Shura. It’s the after effect of it I suppose.”

Seeing the figure of Ikki hanging his head down with his eyes closed, Arisuin, who chased from behind, muttered.

Certainly, Ittou Shura was a technique that used all his strength in one minute.

After using it, Ikki would always sleep to recover his stamina.

However—

(Hu...h.....?)

Do Ku N.

Shizuku felt an ominous premonition that seemed to freeze her heart after seeing that usual scene.

Cold sweat spilled out from her entire body, her body shook.

What exactly was it? Shizuku touched Ikki to find that answer...

“~~~~~!!!!”

She understood.

Her brother, Ikki Kurogane.....was not breathing.

Intermission: A Late Arrival

破軍学園壁新聞

キャラクターピックアップス

文責・日下部加々美

AMANE SHINOMIYA

紫乃宮天音

■PROFILE

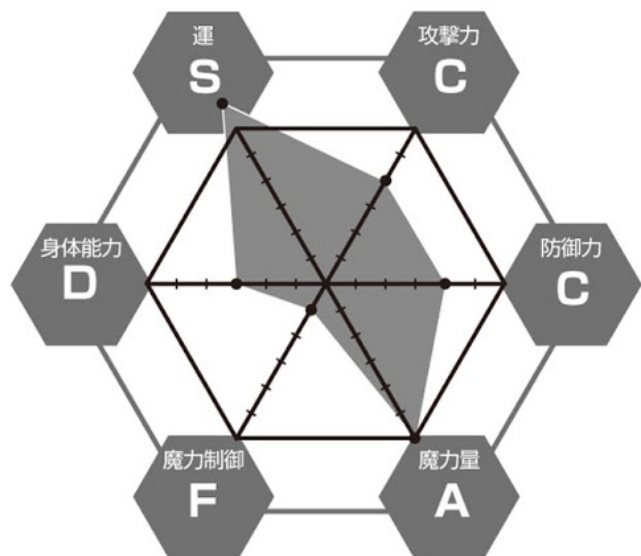
所属：暁学園一年

伐刀者ランク：A

伐刀絶技：^{ネームレスグローリー}過剰なる女神の寵愛

二つ名：^{バッドラック}凶運

人物概要：先輩のストーカー



かがみんチェック！

暁学園代表生の一人。本名は天宮紫音。ただ願うだけで結果的に運命が彼にとって都合のいいように動き、願いが叶うといふとんでもないチート能力の持ち主だよ。でもこの、ただ願うだけですべてが手に入る力は彼から努力する機会を根こそぎ奪い取って、いろいろな人のやっかみを買う原因にもなったみたい。…正直、私もこの力

は絶対欲しくないかな。だって…願っちゃうだけでなんでも叶うなんて、生きる楽しみを全部奪われるみたいなものだもん。…どんなにしんどくても、時間がかかっても、必死に努力して勝ち取った自分だからこそ好きになれると思うから。

HAGUN ACADEMY WALL NEWSPAPER

Character Topics ____ Writer • Kagami Kusakabe

Amane Shinomiya

■ PROFILE

Affiliation: Akatsuki Academy, Year One

Blazer Rank: A

Noble Art: Nameless Glory

Nickname: Bad Luck

Personal Summary: Senpai's stalker

Attribute chart (starting at far left, going clockwise)

Physical Ability: D

Luck: S

Offensive Power: C

Defensive Power: C

Magic Capacity: A

Magic Control: F

Kagamin Check!

One of Akatsuki Academy's representatives, whose real name is Shion Amamiya. He's the owner of a cheat ability that makes wishes come true, since fortune shifts in his favor just from him wishing it so. But it seems this power that gives him everything also deprives him of the ability to earn anything through effort, and provokes envy in the people around him. ...Frankly, I'd definitely not want that kind of power either. After all... getting everything you wish for takes away all of what makes life fun, you know? Someone who achieves victory by desperate effort no matter how tiresome it is, or how long it takes... is better, I think.

Part 1

Through Arisuin's report, Ikki, whose heart had stopped, was immediately carried over to the newest medical facility available in the dome to do an emergency resuscitation surgery.

In a small waiting area before the operation room that only allowed Ikki's relatives and Kurono Shinguuji, the Director of the school he belonged to, Shizuku clasped her hands together as if she was praying while looking at the operation room's door.

And then, two hours after Ikki was brought in.

Despite the light 'in operation' still being lit, one of the doctors came out of the room.

Shizuku immediately went up to him and asked about her brother's situation.

"My Onii-sama! Is my Onii-sama saved!?"

The doctor did not shake or nod his head, and replied in a heavy voice.

".....No, we still don't know."

“Wh-What’s with that!? D-Don’t know you say, what do you mean by that!?”

“That’s, we don’t know what reason is causing that. We first thought that it was a heart attack. There are no external wounds anywhere, only the heart was in the state of stoppage. However, after resuscitating the heart, the brain was having issues, after caring for that then another place caused trouble.....just like in a game of whack-a-mole, as if 「death」 was attracted to his body.”

Death was attracted to him.

The first thing she had connected to those words was the opponent, Amane’s ability.

However...

“But didn’t Onii-sama dodge all of it!?”

That’s right, Shizuku shouted that he had not received a single injury.

However — Kurogane told her that it was a mistaken recognition.

“You see, Kurogane-imouto. If you confirm with the recorded footage.....you will know that both of his arms were grazed

by the reaper's hand when he had protected the main referee. Most likely, the 「death」 seeped in from there.”

“H-How can that be.....!”

The worst situation possible caused Shizuku to feel dizzy standing.

However, when her brother's life or death was still unclear, she couldn't let herself fall.

What Shizuku, who immediately supported herself back up, thought of was — obviously to remove the cause.

“Then if we kill that guy.....!”

“Calm down.”

The person who reproved her for her extreme plan was her father, Itsuki.

Shizuku glared back at him like a vengeful ghost...

“Since the symptoms still appear after Bad Luck has lost his consciousness, it is meaningless to do that.”

“...!”

The reasonable justification made her unable to refute.

Certainly, Amane had lost consciousness at the time the match had ended.

Even so, if the result of death still remained, it meant that once his power carved down the result, it would work regardless of the caster's intention or consciousness.

Itsuki asked Kurono.

“Shinguuji-sensei. Are you able to return my son's condition to before the match with your power to manipulate time?”

However, Kurono shook her head to deny it.

“.....It's regrettable, but that's impossible. Putting aside non-living things, the act of rewinding time is too much of a burden on human body. The limit is several tens of seconds. The human body will not endure the bending of time any longer than that.....Since Kurogane's heart has already stopped for several minutes after he was discovered, my power isn't.....”

“.....I...see.”

“Then, are you saying that there's nothing else we can do!? No, I don't want that!”

Hearing Kurono's answer, Shizuku stood up, unable to endure

anymore, and rushed towards the operation room.

“Shizuku!”

“You cannot go into the operation room!”

Itsuki and the doctor immediately stopped her from entering, but Shizuku would not behave.

She went half berserk while shaking off the two of them.

“Let me go! If you all can’t save him, then I will! I will save my Onii-sama! Don’t obstruct me! Onii-sama! Oniisamaa!”

At that moment.

“Oh my. The waiting area is quite noisy.”

A female voice holding a tinge of anger scolded Shizuku.

“This facility is at least somewhat similar to a hospital, so please keep quiet.”

“Ah, you are.....”

Shizuku remembered that voice.

It was a woman’s voice that she had been in contact with for

just a few hours.

As she looked at the entrance of the waiting area, the person she thought of was standing there.

Wrapped in white robe, a woman with green hair. That was...

“K-Kiriko-sensei!”

The best doctor in Japan known as the White-Robed Knight.

With her arrival, the doctor who was holding Shizuku down raised an elated voice.

Kiriko nodded sightly...

“I have already inquired the story from Chief Kurogane. I will take over the rest.”

Saying so, she walked past them and opened the operation room’s door.

At her back...

“If it’s you, will you be able to save Onii-sama.....?”

Shizuku asked with a sobbing voice.

—Able to save.

She probably wanted such affirmation.

She probably wanted to feel safe.

However, as doctors are existences that handle life, they could not make such promises so lightly.

They must let the patients and patients' family feel safe, but they were not allowed to say empty words without basis. Hence, Kiriko turned back to Shizuku...

"Imouto-san. You, could it be that you are taking me for an idiot?"

Her brilliantly red lips showed a powerful smile, and said.

"How can one be a doctor if one cannot beat a reaper or two that tricked the patient?"

Part 2

The lead-colored clouds that appeared at noon on that day had long floated to the western sky, revealing a night with a beautiful moon.

Amane Shinomiya sat up on his bed in the sickroom. While watching the white moon, he thought about the words of Ryouma conveyed through Ikki.

Soon after, with a small sound, the window of the sickroom opened.

“.....”

“Oh, what? You already woke up huh. That’s a pity.”

The one who had entered the room by opening the window like a ninja was a petite person wearing a crimson kimono.

It was the Yaksha Princess, Nene Saikyou.

She pouted as if the fun had disappeared and put the magic pen in her hand back into her kimono.

“Even though you’ve caused us quite a lot of trouble, so much that I thought of playing a prank on you, you are still a lucky kid as always.”

Lucky. Amane truly thought so.

Since currently, there was just something he wanted to ask.

That was—

“.....Is Ikki-kun alive?”

Saikyou showed a slightly surprised expression hearing that question.

“You noticed?”

“Just now, I heard it from the conversation of the staff here. He’s in critical condition.”

“I see.”

Saikyou was convinced, she also only knew the situation from Kurono’s phone call a while ago.

“He safely kept his life. The White-Robed Knight rushed over and handled it.”

“That person.....”

That nickname was still fresh in Amane’s memory.

It was the name of the knight he won against without fighting

by using underhanded method in the first round.

“I came here to pass on that Kiriko-chan’s message.”

“To me, is it?”

Amane was not intimate with her enough to receive a message, but prepared himself for what it might be.

Saikyou...

“I paid you back for the first round. Serves you right. That’s all.”

Passed on the message with a mean smile as if imitating Kiriko’s emotions.

Amane laughed dryly at that...

“I see. In other words, I couldn’t even win against my opponent from the first round huh.”

He accepted that result.

“.....So strong, everyone is.”

“Of course. Kiriko-chan is a monster that would definitely receive an A-Rank evaluation if she seriously did her knight activities. She wouldn’t look inferior standing beside Stella-

chan or Ouma-chan. She would be too much of an opponent to the current Ama-chan.”

“By the way, is that the only thing you came for?”

“No, there’s one more. It’s related to the incident of you rampaging this time. The Committee and League have reached a consensus to pass on the judgement the day after tomorrow.....It’s naturally obvious that you will receive a heavy punishment. Well, it shouldn’t matter to the terrorist Ama-chan.”

“I will receive the punishment.”

“.....!”

Not expecting that reply without any delay, Saikyou widened her eyes.

However, to her reaction...

“That’s why, Saikyou-sensei. Taking into account of my intentions of reflecting, can you lighten my sentence a little?”

Amane used his feminine voice to plead without any shame.

Hearing Amane’s words, Saikyou sighed in resignation...

“What a cunning brat. Well, I’m a teacher now. If you can still

be saved.....I can more or less say a few good words.”

She still gave a positive answer.

The organization known as League still owed her some favors to make that possible.

However, she obviously did not intend to do that for free.

Saikyou had put on a sharp glare and gave conditions to Amane.

“But in return, absolutely do not meddle in tomorrow’s finals, you got it?”

The finals next day was obviously the match between Ikki and Stella.

Although the two of them were not bothered about Amane’s interference, it did not mean that he could just interfere with that reason.

That was really a mood spoiling matter.

Be it as a teacher or as a knight.

Hence Saikyou used the form of a trade to enforce that promise on Amane.

In response, Amane...

“I promise. There’s no reason for me to do it anyway.”

Accepted that condition crisply with a smile as if the evil was exorcised.

.....Seeing that, it was unlikely for him to break his promise.

“Then, I will be returning since I’ve finished my business. You should also sleep soon.”

“Yes. Good night.....Thank you.”

Finally, Amane lowered his head towards Saikyou and expressed his gratitude.

Saikyou took a glance at that, went out of the room and closed the window, then smiled.

“Seriously. What a refreshing expression.”

Right after that — she went straight towards the presence she had felt a while ago.

“Oya oya. What a rare encounter, Tsukikage-sensei. What are you doing at this hour?”

Waving her kimono’s sleeve, she called out in an intimate

voice.

In response, Tsukikage stopped in his steps on the hallway from the other end, and smiled bitterly at the 'rare encounter' greeting.

"That is my student's sickroom. Isn't it natural for me to visit him?"

"What, are you still continuing that? The students of Akatsuki Academy have all lost."

That's right. It was as Saikyou had said, with Amane's defeat, the pawns of Akatsuki Academy had all lost.

The plan Tsukikage made by illegally forming the National Akatsuki Academy had mostly failed. However—

"All of that is a pity. I was hoping that Akatsuki Academy's strength could prove that they would be able to carry on the future of this country."

The attitude of Tsukikage who shrugged his shoulders did not really seem to be that of regret.

No, rather.....it seemed to be the opposite...

"You are someone who doesn't show his true intentions."

Even Saikyou could not see through what he was thinking.

However, putting that aside for the time being, Saikyou changed the topic.

“Well, it’s good to meet you here. I want to ask about one thing, is it fine?”

“What might that be?”

Saikyou’s question was just one.

It was the preparation he made before the semi-finals a while ago.

“The second match of the semi-finals. It’s about how you saw through Ama-chan’s intention to forfeit and told Kuro-bou the method to provoke Ama-chan, but did you really do it for the sake of making Ama-chan win?”

She could not be convinced no matter what.

There were many other methods to set Amane up.

Handing the trigger to Ikki had too many uncertain factors.

At least, Saikyou thought so. Hence...

“Sensei hoped that Kuro-bou could save Ama-chan from the

start, didn't you?"

"——"

Tsukikage kept silent and did not answer Saikyou's question immediately.....a tiny curve showed on the edges of his lips.

He remembered something.

Last night. When he handed over the trigger known as Amane's past to Ikki, he inquired...

「Please tell me one thing in the end. Is the one you want to set up Amane-kun? Or — is it me?」

Saikyou's question held the same meaning.

In that case, he chose to answer in the same way.

"I wonder. My job is full of superficial acting after all. After continuing that for so many years, I don't even know my own true intention."

He just gave a vague answer that could not be considered an answer at all.

At that, Saikyou...

"I see."

Responded disinterestedly.

Since Tsukikage had no intention of answering it, she immediately discarded that question as it was worthless. On top of that...



“Then one more.”

“Didn’t you ask for just one question?”

“A man shouldn’t be so fussy with the details.”

She took a step closer to Tsukikage and asked.

“What I’m interested in is the matter about Sensei knowing enough of Ama-chan’s past to be able to tell another person.”

“.....”

“Seeing Ama-chan’s behavior, I don’t think that he told others about it. More importantly, considering the property of Nameless Glory, it would be impossible for any disadvantageous information of Ama-chan to be leaked to a third party. If that was possible, then there would exist a method of 「having an even stronger causality interference ability」.

Hey Tsukikage-sensei. I don’t know what exactly your Noble Arts is, as I couldn’t find anything no matter which database I had searched, but is taking an abnormal action of a country’s leader joining hands with terrorists related to that power?”

Although Saikyou’s tone was intimate, her eyes contained a

sharp pressure, and pierced Tsukikage.

Even though she didn't say it out loud, that gaze did not allow him to play the fool.

However — in fact, Tsukikage no longer had any intention of playing the fool regarding that question the moment Akatsuki Academy was defeated. However.....it was not the time for it yet.

Hence, Tsukikage replied as such.

“That answer will probably be told by me not far in the future.”

Not there, but in a more appropriate place, in front of more appropriate actors — to be said.

Part 3

The awakening arrived slowly, like seeping water.

Opening his heavy eyelids, what he saw was an unfamiliar grid-pattern ceiling.

“Mm...u.....where am I?”

Ikki sat up and rubbed his eyes while looking around.

It was inside a clean room with white as base theme. Simple decorations. Also the bed he was sitting on.

It was no different from a sickroom.

Even his groggy head could understand it.

However, it was strange.

He was certain that he should be.....in the waiting room.

(Putting that aside, my body feels uncomfortably heavy.....)

Not only his body, his head also felt dull.

He understood that it was currently night time from the darkness of the room, but he could not determine the exact time.

Ikki sought the answer of that question from the student datapad on top of his uniform folded next to his pillow.

He pushed the power switch and pressed on the display.

The time displayed was 10:30pm.

It was nearing the time for the date to change.

It was natural for his body to feel languid if he slept from noon till night—

“.....Eh.”

At that point — Ikki’s expression froze.

At the date displayed next to time.

10 August. That was — the next day after semi-finals.

It was the day he would be going to the finals with Stella.

“——!!!!”

In an instant, he remembered the moments before losing consciousness as if a firework went off in his brain.

The unusual sense of powerlessness when he reached the

waiting room.

It was clearly different from the usual fatigue caused by the backlash of using Ittou Shura, it was despair, he immediately noticed.

He was being violated by the result known as 「death」.

—As he thought about it, it was the moment when he had protected the main referee.

As it was too sudden, he did not pay attention to it, but at that time it probably grazed him slightly. After comprehending that much, he thought that it would be bad, but.....the sense of loss robbed even the strength for Ikki to make a sound, shutting off his consciousness.

Most likely, someone caught him and carried him to where he was after that.

—No, that kind of thing didn't matter!

Rather than that, did he misread the current date?

If not.....

“~~~~~!”

As he thought about it, cold sweat oozed out from his entire

body.

However, believing that he was mistaken, Ikki looked at the reality he wanted to see again—

(M-Mail.....!)

Ikki noticed in the corner that he had received a mail.

Sender's name was — Stella.

He immediately opened the mail as if he was possessed by something.

The contents did not even have a title, just one sentence.

「I will be waiting for you at the ring.」

After seeing that, Ikki dashed out from his bed.

Part 4

“Hah...haa...!”

Ikki did not even change his clothes or wear his slippers, and ran to the bay dome, indicated by the mail, barefeet in the night.

He passed through the empty reception counter, dashed into the contender waiting room, pushed open the door connected to the entrance gate — and ran towards the exit shone by the moonlight.

Then, the instant he crossed the gate...

“——.....”

A dignified silhouette standing on the ring attracted Ikki’s eyes.

A beautiful girl with crimson colored hair fluttering in the night sea breeze.

He went up the ring without adjusting his rugged breath and walked towards the girl.

Then he noticed.

Her scarlet pupils also reflected only him.

Those pupils were mixed with sadness.

“.....Stella.”

“You woke up really late, Ikki.”

“...”

“I have been waiting. A whole day. The whole time.”

The words weaved by those pitiful lips made Ikki feel so desperate as if he would collapse on the ground.

He did not see wrong after all.

The Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival.....was already over.

While he was foolishly sleeping.

Even though Stella was waiting for him at that promised place all the while.

—How did it become like that?

He had to apologize.

For not being able to carry out his promise.

Even though he thought so...

“.....—Ah...!”

What leaked out from Ikki's throat was only saddened groans.

The corners of his eyes felt burning hot, his throat ached.

Apology could not come out in words.

And what he finally squeezed out was...

“DAMN IT.....!”

Only stifled anger at himself.

He did not hate Amane.

Just that, he hated himself to the point of wanting to cut himself into pieces.

Even though he already came that far, finally, with only one more step to go.....!

“~~~~~!!!!”

He lacked the tenacity to take that last step.

That turned everything into a waste.

That reality was too heavy to accept—

Sorry. It was such a frustration that a word like that could not even come out.

On the other hand, seeing Ikki's figure trembling in frustration, Stella...

"I wanted to hear that. Not your apology, but Ikki's heart."

—Muttered those confusing words with joy to the point that tears of happiness could flow out anytime.

"Ste...lla.....?"

Ikki was about to ask what she meant.

However, before that, Stella turned her head back as her hair fluttered...

"You all heard that right!? Everyone!"

And shouted. —Immediately...

「OOOOOOooOoooo!!!!」

Suddenly, dazzling light burned through the darkness, tens of thousands of cheers and applause like a squall hit Ikki's entire body.

If he looked at the audience stand that he had not paid any attention to due to focusing all of his attention on Stella, he would've noticed that the entire crowd of audience was still there despite the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival, which should've already been over, and sending him encouraging gazes.

"Th-This is, what exactly....."

The situation was so unexpected that he could only say those default words.

The person to answer him was standing right at where Stella looked at.

A bald old man with a stern face stood right below the huge screen.

It was the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival Organizing Committee President, Yuuzou Kaieda.

He spoke.

"Everyone has been waiting. For you to wake up."

“President Kaieda.....! But, the finals is already...”

“Not over yet. Isn’t that so?”

He asked the audience crowded at the audience stand.

The audience cheered loudly in response...

「OBVIOUSLY!」

「We have been looking forward to it!」

「The Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival is not over until we see the match between Crimson Princess and Another One!」

Everyone was shouting for the ending they wanted.

And amongst them...

“ONIISAMAAA! ABSOLUTELY...YOU ABSOLUTELY MUST WIN!”

Shizuku, whose eyes were red and swollen, and Arisuin next to her...

“Kurogane-kun! Stella-san! Fight on, both of you!”

Kanata and Touka, who were waving their hands...

“Don’t worry about the surroundings! We all will follow-up for

you, so fight to your heart's content!"

Starting with Moroboshi, the figures of his rivals fighting for the same summit in the Festival were also there.

And everyone was seeking it.

The fight that Ikki wished for to the point of him shaking in frustration.

".....Everyone....."

"Nobody will be satisfied. Not until they see the fight between you and Stella-kun. The Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival that revolves around the Japan's summit, that is the battle between the two of you. —You can be proud of it."

At the same time Kaieda spoke those words, Stella turned towards Ikki again — swung her Device, *Lævateinn*, with the momentum of her turn, and pointed straight at Ikki.

Then enveloped Ikki with her burning crimson eyes...

"What's left is just your feeling, Ikki."

"——!"

Receiving everyone's feelings, a soundless cry came out from his throat.

Different from the tears of frustration, warm tear drops moistened the corners of his eyes.

Not out of kindness, nor out of sympathy.

Just, 'not satisfied if they did not see the fight between himself and Stella'.

—Aah, what a proud thing that was.

His reply had long been decided.

There was no need for words. Ikki wiped away the tears, and he hit his *Intetsu* with all of his strength at *Lævateinn*, Stella's soul, before his eyes.

Sparks flew, steel and steel locked against each other.

However, despite the full strength hit, *Lævateinn* did not shake a tiny bit.

The feedback felt like hitting against a huge chunk of metal.

Feeling the numbness in his hand from that girl's powerful strength, Ikki trembled.

(That's how it should be.....!)

He overcame various kinds of battles.

He won against many fierce opponents.

However, as expected, she was — special.

If he did not have a fight against her, if he did not win against her...

He could not let the curtain of that dream stage drop.....!

“With this, after confirming the intent to battle of the two contenders, I shall exercise the authority of the official Organizing Committee President, and acknowledge the holding of the finals of the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival! The match will begin tomorrow at 7:00pm! Both sides, please adjust the condition of your heart and body to the most optimum, and have a match that will not leave any regret!!”

““YES!!!!””



Afterword

Greetings. I am the author, Riku Misora.

Thank you for purchasing the eighth volume of Rakudai Kishi no Eiyuutan.

Did you enjoy it?

However, Amane-kun is really a serious child. If Misora ever possessed the power of Nameless Glory, he would be enjoying life in easy mode anyhow he likes (lol)

Well, it's just that not achieving anything with your own ability won't give you a sense of fulfillment, so it may certainly be an empty life. I myself as well, was dancing in joy when my debut received excellence award from GA Publisher-san. What a dilemma.

Next will finally be the climax of Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival arc. The final battle with Stella.

It will be the finale of the promise between the two that has brought this series called Rakudai Kishi no Eiyuutan up to here.

You can say that it will be a volume that will summarize everything.

As the author, I will also write it with my all, I will be glad to receive support.

And then, Rakudai Kishi no Eiyuutan's anime has finally started!

I have attended the scenario meeting a few times, and was involved in it from way back, so I'm really happy.

Did you notice that the first part of episode 1 of the anime is outrageously long?

That is because, starting with the director, along with everyone from the staff, they did not want to cut the battle of Stella vs Ikki, so they made it into a special episode. I am happy.

After that, what made me the happiest is right before the ending of episode 1 (the song is the opening song). The scene where Ikki was going for a handshake but Stella wanted to bump fists.

Seeing that, I thought "I'm really glad that these people are the ones to make it!".

That's right. She is such a girl.

I am really grateful that they understood the direction of this series.

I am looking forward to how it will be like from episode 2 onwards.

—Now then, let's change the topic slightly, I actually went to Taiwan in August.

Rakudai Kishi is published in Taiwan by Sharp Point Press, in regards to that, I went to attend autograph sessions at the Animate^[15] and the booth of Sharp Point Press in a manga exhibition event over there.

Before going to Taiwan, Editor-san severely warned me...

“It's deadly hot” “Salt will actually appear on the towel hung on the neck and make it gritty”

Things like that, hearing those made me rather frightened, but perhaps I went at a good time, or Editor-san made an overly big fuss, I did my work at Taiwan in a rather fine weather.

The first thing left in my mind about the impression of Taiwan was...

“7-eleven, seriously a lot!” something like that.

The chain stores were clearly more densely packed than Japan.

I felt like I would see one shop every minute while riding in a car down the city.

It was just that many. Family Mart also had about that many.

There was also Japan’s fast food chain Yoshinoya in the city, shops also sold Japanese confectionary, fast food, and many others, it was a place rather comfortable for a Japanese.

As a Japanese, Taiwan may be a perfect place for the first overseas trip.

Well, it was about work this time.

Since it was the first overseas autograph session, I had been nervous from the start till end.

However, thanks to the follow-up of Editor-san over there, and riding on the high tension of the Taiwanese readers coming for the autograph session, I calmed down in the latter

half of the autograph session. While signing for the readers, there were also people who left Japanese cheering messages, it made me really happy.

This afterword would probably be translated over there when published, so I would like to express my gratitude.

Thank you very much. I received your encouragement.

Also, in that autograph session, Misora had made a mistake of writing the date wrongly for one signature. After signing for over hundreds of times, although the signature itself would not be wrong, the date could become confusing.....And it's a girl on top of that! It was an important female reader, probably few in number, of Rakudai!

I would like to apologize for that here as well, I am very sorry. Sorry.

Then, after finishing my work, I was finally able to do my first sightseeing!

The rumored night city! I always wanted to visit once.

It seemed that Taiwan's daytime was too hot, so there were many people doing night shopping, and the night city was developed for that sake. Seeing the products displayed, it was certainly such line-ups. Unlike the festival stalls in Japan,

the line-ups were clothes and other groceries meant for the locals.

Night city became famous as a tourist attraction, but it was basically a place meant for the locals. That's why I was happy to be able to see it.

And I ate the famous stinky tofu.

That incredibly stinky tofu had appeared in various mangas. I knew that it was available in the night city from Wakakozake, and had been looking forward to eating it.

Well then, I was nervous while ordering it, thinking what kind of abnormality would be served, —however.

N-Normal.....

Wasn't it just normal fried tofu?

Such was the case, in the first place, my sense of smell had already been short circuited by the overwhelming stink from the shop (lol). Hence, my personal impression was a normal fried tofu.

Just that, according to what the local Editor-san told me, the one I ordered was still considerably light-weight, there were more stinky ones. I would like to try it out next time.

I interacted with the overseas readers like that, tried the stinky tofu, had a very meaningful trip. Everyone in Taiwan, thank you very much.

And Won-san, who has always been drawing amazing illustrations for this series, has to change the schedule to match the making of the anime, thank you very much.

The person in charge of making the manga, Soramichi-san, thank you very much. The manga is just at the climax of volume 2. Kuraudo is rampaging wildly, so the readers who had not seen it, please take a look!

Next, beginning with the Editor-san, and everyone from the staff, who have been putting in your best effort for the anime of this series, I express my gratitude. Director Oonuma-san and everyone from the scenario team, you all have always been brushing up the scenario until the last minute, thank you very much.

Mikio Sakai-san, thank you for the best hot-blooded opening. I don't even know how many hundreds of times I have replayed the second PV (lol).

And for perfectly singing out Stella's feelings in the ending, Ali Project-san, thank you very much.

And finally, for this series to be able to be made into anime, it is thanks to the support of every reader of this series after all. Really, thank you so much!

Thanks to everyone making it into animation, Ikki and co are able to move.

I will be glad if you all can enjoy it.

Then let us meet against at the ninth volume. Good bye!

Notes

1 laido - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/laido>

2 ダイヤの乱れ - Please refer to Vol 5 Epilogue for the actual incident. And 'ダイヤの乱れ' refers to an issue on the railway in Japan's 'service planning diagram' for trains. Please research yourself if you want to find out more.

3 Tenryuu Gusoku - 天龍具足 (Heavenly Dragon Armor).

4 Kyokujitsu Isshin Ryuu - 旭日一心流 (Rising Sun Synthesis Style).

5 Hono Ikazuchi - 火雷 (Fire Thunder).

6 Kokutou・Yatagarasu - 黒刀・八咫鳥 (Black Sword・Yatagarasu).

7 Kokushichou - 黒死蝶 (Black Death Butterfly).

8 一山いくらの木っ端 - A Japanese idiom. Literal meaning: Wood shaving that piled up to a mountain. Refers to those weak/average ones that are left out when compared to the elites.

9 Kyokujitsu Isshin Ryuu・Jin no Kyoku - 旭日一心流・迅の極 (Rising Sun Synthesis Style・Extremity of Speed).

10 空元氣も元氣の内 - Japanese idiom. An empty cheer is still considered as cheering, meaning that regardless of the meaning behind the cheering, it is still considered cheering. Used in cases to brighten up the mood. Has similar effect to

smiling for the sake of

11 Chanbara - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samurai_cinema

12 目を点にして固まった - A description in Japanese that usually means stunned from the situation and unable to react.

13 弘法にも筆の誤り - Japanese idiom. 弘法:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C5%ABkai>

14 寸剱 - A martial art that strikes from a short range with explosive power to take down the enemy.

15 Animate - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animate>.

Credits

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Translator: Sora

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